

BCM

A Belgian Japanese- and pop culture Magazine
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Interviews

Mikaru
Amai taiyaki

*First time in
Europe*
**GOOD
THRU DATE**

Fashion & features

Travel Japan
Yamikawaii



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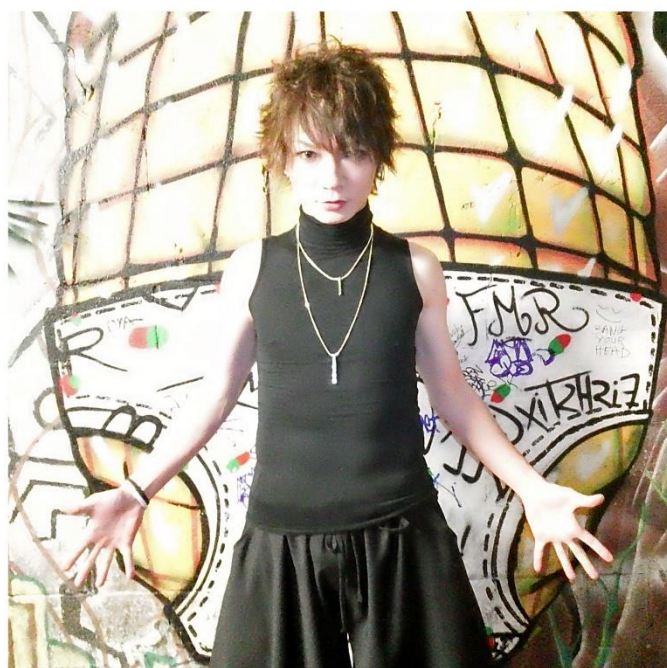
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INTRODUCTION

Spring is here, with summer just around the bend and we're back for another edition!

We've got travel by Helcanen, who talks about konbini food and takes us further along her explorations of Japan in another photography feature.

BirdBrain FX is back with an article on how to safely use makeup and take good care of your products, as well as bringing you another makeup + bodypaint tutorial. Right in time for the summer events and festival season!

We have art by Mikaru, and interviews with GOOD THRU DATE, Mikaru and the team behind Amai taiyaki, so you get both music and food.

Lora talks about the history of Yumekawaii and Yamikawaii and the latter is our fashion focus for the feature, and of course there are concert and event reviews and plenty of other things for you to enjoy!

Have a great spring and summer everyone!

Hilde Heyvaert
Editor in chief

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Thorned vines



Hello dear readers!
Spring has sprung, it's delightful
as ever, and it's got me seeing green (in a good way)!
I was inspired by creeping vines and decided to
create this look for you to try out,
so let's get started!

By BirdBrainFX
www.instagram.com/birdbrainfx

Part 1:

Thorny Vine Eyes

Step 1: Apply a base layer of Kryolan Aquacolor in 511 (Sage Green) to your eyelids, carrying up into your temples, then down your cheekbones and finally down your neck to the collarbones using a damp sponge.

Step 2: Next I used a shimmery green eyeshadow fill in my eyelid and a dark teal eyeshadow around the outer edge of my eyelids. I also used the teal to contour my cheekbones, jawline and collarbones; applying and blending with a large fluffy shadow brush.

Step 3: After that I applied an eyebrow using Mehron Makeup Paradise AQ in Orange and Beach Berry Red using a small rounded brush. Obviously you could try out a colorful brow like mine, but I am doing it to match my hair color so matching your own color to this look should work out well either way!

Step 4: To apply the vines I'm using Mehron Makeup Paradise AQ in Forest Green on a damp medium round brush. Working from the eye and pulling the lines outward I'm creating curves and swirls around the eye area to the appearance of mimic vines.

Step 5: The amount of vines is up to you; the more bends you add to them the more interesting they will look to the eye, so get creative! Also keep in mind if you would like to add thorns or leaves to your vines that you must space them properly, leaving room for the accents.

Step 6: Whilst the vine lines were drying I took a light coral eyeshadow on a fluffy brush and blushed out my nose and the surrounding area for a little more color pop!

Step 7: Then using the same dark green water activated makeup and a small, round slightly dampened brush I added the little thorns to the vine lines I created. Again, you can add as many or as little as you like and there's really no set direction or placement because nature is messy. If you'd like to be more precise that's also an option but I prefer messy.

Step 8: After adding the thorns to my creeping vines I also decided to add some dark green freckles with the same brush.

Step 9: Next using Mehron Makeup Paradise AQ in White I highlighted the vines to make them more pronounced in the design. You could also highlight the thorns too (as I have done a few), but it all depends on what you want to bring out more.

Step 10: Using e.l.f. Liquid Liner in Jet Black I added a bold wing to my eyelid. Then I used a little bit of Belladonna's Cosmetics highlighter on the tip of my nose and finally filled in my lips with a cream makeup in a rusty brown/terracotta shade.





1



2



3



4

Part 2: Skull & Roses Chest

Step 1: Prepare a stencil using wax paper and a black sharpie. You can find a design you like online(pinterest), print it and trace it onto the wax paper easily if you don't want to freehand a stencil. Pro tip : make sure it fits in the desired area first! I'm using a thin layer of deodorant to get the stencil to stick and transfer to my skin. To do this I'm going to lay the wax paper stencil sharpie side down and smooth it out to get a good impression. Then I'm going to gently lift it off from the edges and try not to smudge it; revealing my stencil. Check out previous issues of BCM for a more in depth pictorial on this process!

Step 2: Starting off with the roses around the base of the skull I've used a light coral eyeshadow and a hot pink eyeshadow on a flat shadow brush to add color. First using the light coral as a base and then adding depth with the hot pink.

Step 3: Next I filled in the skull using Mehron Makeup Paradise AQ in White. I also used this to highlight the roses as you can see.

Step 4: Using Mehron Makeup Paradise AQ in Black I outlined the skull and roses and filled in the dark points. I also went back in with Forest Green to add vines around the skull and around my neck/chest area. This is optional, but I wanted to tie it all together and with that the makeup is complete! Add your favorite floral accessories; it's green so it goes with any and every flower choice!

If you are so inclined to use any part of this tutorial I would love to see your results, so tag me @BirdBrainFX on Instagram, Twitter or Facebook to show me your colorful creations!



FINISHED!

Products used: Belladonna's Cosmetics, Moon Magick Highlighter Palette. C&C Beauty, Flash Color Palette in Rust Brown. e.l.f., Liquid Liner in Jet Black. Juvia's Place, The Zulu Palette in Green Shimmer and Teal. Karity, Matte Palette in Cancun and Lumbia. Kryolan, Aquacolor in 511 (Sage Green). Mehron, Paradise AQ Bodypaint in Forest Green, White and Black. Old Spice, Pure Sport Deodorant.

Many of us love makeup. To conceal a blemish or those damned panda eyes, to change our entire facial features or simply because it brings us joy to play around with it. Which makeup aficionado doesn't love thinking up new looks, trying something they saw on the gram or copying a YouTube tutorial. And putting on your face together with friends, possibly even sharing products, is fun. However, there's care to be had. We touch some products with our skin, and even with clean hands, we transfer the oils of our skin and residue to our products. You blow kick-back off your pans, and use mascara on eyes that might be a little goopy.

So here's a few ways to keep your products as clean and hygienic as possible. Because you don't have to be a professional to be aware of make-up hygiene and safety, and not only does this mean that your products are sure to last a lot longer, it also makes them safe to share with a friend, or to let them swatch them.

These are the main things to do when you are trying to keep and use your makeup as hygienically as possible.

Isopropyl alcohol

You might have heard of isopropyl, or 99% alcohol, as a means to activate alcohol activated paint. That said, however, this grade of alcohol will kill bacteria stone dead. Some YouTubers have claimed it just dissolves makeup off brushes, but it doesn't. There's a reason why this is a component in a lot of disinfectants. It kills germs (don't go spraying this on cuts and scrapes now, it will burn like no tomorrow and it's not meant to use for that purpose as is, use an actual disinfectant!). And it dries fast. Making it ideal to disinfect some of your beauty products.

So if you have a tendency to swatch your powder products or cream lipsticks, or apply them with your fingers, or leave your brushes out, this is your friend.

70% alcohol will also do for disinfecting purposes, but it's not quite as strong. That said, if you feel 99% is overkill, go for that. If you're also into SFX, 99% is definitely the better choice as it also activates some paints you might want to use. Simply spray on powder products or your cream lipstick (the traditional type that comes in a bullet) or over the hairs of your brushes and leave it to dry. You can gently blot the lipstick with a paper towel, of course, but we feel that's just wasting paper.

Careful with natural hair brushes though, as alcohol dries out so it's not the best for those. But synthetics, you're good to go. This isn't suitable for disinfecting cream products such as e.g. cream blushes, however. See our next point for a sanitary use of those.

Brushes are your best friend

A doe foot or dropper applicator is all fine and dandy, but your skin, even after you cleaned it, has oils in it. Furthermore, you likely will have used a primer first, which means that that will also transfer to your applicator. If you use the product just on yourself, it's rarely an issue (unless you have serious problems with your skin), but if you share it with another person, or are just a stickler for clean use of cosmetics, it's best to transfer as much of the product as you need to a clean palette. If you worry about how clean that is, spray it with 99% alcohol and wipe it down with a clean cloth. And then apply the product with a brush. This will keep your liquid or cream product clean.

If you have cream products in a jar, you can scoop some out and put those on a palette as well, avoiding having to go in with your fingers. Because even if you're the only one that uses them, it will often spoil before the actual expiration date. Of course, brushes need to be cleaned. If you've used it, clean it. If you want to do the same look a few times that week, make sure you don't use that same brush with that same product for longer than a week. Same with beauty sponges, clean them at least once a week, even if you've only used them once. If it's very warm, and you've used cream products on your brush, clean it as soon as you can, because if it dries in, it is unlikely to easily come out, and it might ruin your brush permanently.

Drying your brush the right way is also important, either let it dry flat on a clean towel, or hang it upside down in a special brush drying rack. This is so the water can't seep into the metal of the handle where the hairs have been glued down. If you dry them upright once or twice in a pinch, it'll be fine,

but do it all the time and your brushes will eventually fall apart, some sooner than other. There's a variety of brush cleaning products around, so use what you prefer. Always check the ingredients though, in case the cleaning liquid contains something you're allergic to!

Having read this, you will realise the utter and total lack of hygiene you find at drugstore and even larger beauty store counters. Whilst some counters will have alcohol available to disinfect, most noteworthy lipsticks, most of them will not. So that lipstick you see at your local store may look super appealing, think twice about actually applying it to your lips. The person before you might be ill, have an infectious rash, etc. That and it's just plain unsanitary.

Keeping swatches restricted to the back of your hand or arm is advisable if they can't offer your disinfectant (which also goes for powder products, because you don't want eyeshadow applied on your face that has all the finger germs in it).

When asked if you want something applied to your face, you totally can be that guy and check how clean the brushes of the employee that is offering you first. Because having makeup applied to your face with a brush that is clearly dirty, and thus has been used on lord knows how many people before you, is also a recipe for potential break-out disaster. Or worse, because they might have used a product previously that you're allergic to.

Swatching only on the back of your hand or on your arm also has the added advantage that even IF you are allergic to a new product, you'll at least not get a rash in your face, and it's easy to remove without messing up makeup you might already be wearing.

Tip: always carry your own wet wipes (preferably bio degradable/compostable ones!) because many stores might not offer something that is safe to use for you if you have sensitive skin and/or allergies.

What you should NEVER do, under NO circumstance, is share a mascara. Just don't. Especially not with complete strangers. The eye is basically an open gate to the rest of your body and sharing mascara is one of the easiest ways to get in serious trouble. Risk of eye infections and even going blind is not some story told to scare people into buying more products, it has happened, many times.

Expiration dates are on the package for a reason, but then still a company wants to sell. Whilst it's true that you shouldn't use a liquid product for longer than a year (tops, as some expire sooner), some can last up to two years. If you notice a change in the smell or formula, for the worst, chuck it. Powder products and cream lipsticks, however, can last much longer, especially when you take good care of them. But again, it depends from product to product and how well you have taken care of it. If powder turns into colourful dust that suddenly doesn't apply well anymore, or it smells iffy (or iffy than when you bought it, because let's be honest, some products don't smell nice), get rid of it.

Powder products, noteworthy eyeshadows, may also oxidise and give off a sort of, often black, bubbling look. If you are unsure of whether it's just dust or dirt, try blowing it off like you would kick-back. If it doesn't come off: chuck it. Immediately.

When a liquid lipstick smells strange, becomes goopy and gross and doesn't apply smoothly anymore, chuck it.

No matter how rare a formula, finding a dupe is better than ending up at the dermatologist's office (and cheaper, too).

A lot depends on storage. Storing them as temperature steady (same temperature year round) as possible and outside of direct sunlight is definitely the best. You could buy a make-up fridge if you're super extra, but that's by no means a necessity.

Of course there are people that do all the things they should not and are fine, but it just takes one really bad product to really mess you up, and knowing how to avoid that risk is a good thing in our book.

As are handy tips and tricks to keep your makeup good to use as long as possible.

So we hope you can take away something from this piece.

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Visit: PARIS

France

We at BCM often receive questions of where in Belgium and Europe is good to visit. We aren't travel agents, but we can make recommendations! So in this Visit! feature we will focus on a European city, museum or landmark, per edition.

We know Paris isn't the logical choice for a visit because the ongoing Yellow Vest protests that are rife with violence, but we wanted to feature this key city of Europe regardless.

<https://en.parisinfo.com>

Photography by Hilde Heyvaert and Bert Van den Wyngaert



Paris is full of beautiful art and architecture, as well as details where you least expect it.

So take a walk around town rather than relying on the métro to get everywhere, and take it all in!



Les Galeries Lafayette are probably the most famous mall of France, housing not only a wide variety of (high) fashion and beauty brands as well as a handful of cafes and eateries. But what really makes it worth while are the temporary exhibitions and the observation deck, which are all free.



The Tuileries garden is probably the biggest park in inner city Paris. If you want to soak up some art and culture without visiting any museums, this is the place to be because it is full of statues, as well as home to the Arc de Triomphe, and you can even walk to the Carrousel du Louvre. Or you can visit to relax in one of the many chairs. Pro-tip: bring your own food and drinks, because the café prices are extortionate!



Whilst the Louvre is definitely the best known museum in Paris, it is by no means the only one. Paris is absolutely lousy with museums, and no matter your interest or passion, it probably does have a building full of things dedicated to it.

If you do want to visit the Louvre, there are two recommended ways to go about it (other than avoid it on the weekend when it is terribly busy): firstly plan out what exactly you want to see, and go there the long way through le Jardin des Tuileries, which allows you not only to visit the beautiful park, but also see the Place de la Concorde and L'Arc de Triomphe.

The second is to get there as soon as humanly possible on a weekday, because the Louvre is so vast you can easily spend several days in there to see absolutely everything.



Paris is one of the fashion capitals of the world. Even if you don't have the budget to go all out designer shopping, there's nothing stopping you from admiring the new designs in stores such as *Les Galeries Lafayette*. The windows in that street are always worth viewing if you're into fashion, as stores tend to have really fun ones and sometimes go above and beyond in their displays.



You surely know what a **konbini** is, if not, it's simply a convenience store in Japan. Usually it's open 24/7, too. The main brands of konbini you will see throughout Japan are *FamilyMart*, *Lawson* and *7-eleven*. There are many others, which are a little less present, and often harder to find than the big three, such as *Daily*. All of them sell a wide range of food and practical items such as socks, office supplies, snacks, drinks (including alcohol), beauty and personal hygiene products, magazines, ... Enter one of the numerous konbini and you'll surely find what you need!

You might think that a convenience store is not the place to find healthy food, but what if I told you that it is?

Japanese food, in general, is already lighter than what we are used to over here. And just like with Western food, calories are often listed on the package, so if that's something you care about, you can easily manage your diet.

The most common food you'll find in a konbini are *onigiri* (rice balls). There are plenty of types available, ranging from plain rice with *nori* (seaweed) leaf wrapped around them, or those filled with tuna, *tarako*, etc. Aside from those, salads, dressing, and that's just the cold foods. If you prefer a hot meal, there are many types of dishes available and the staff will always ask you if you would like it heated up in the microwave. Personally if it's late and I'm not in the mood for something heavy I often go for the *gyoza* or a *yakitori* from the counter. When it's cold, having *oden* (a kind of soup) is always nice.

If you fancy a dessert, you can find typical Japanese sweets and pastries such as *dango*, *melon bread* and *dorayaki*. If you prefer to get something you are more familiar to, you'll also find bread rolls, puddings, yoghurts and more.

In Japan you'll also find *Natural Lawson*, which sells natural products. I can't say it's organic like we are used to, as the Japanese aren't as worried as organically grown foods as we are. Nevertheless, you can definitely find products that are healthier than those sold in regular konbini. When visiting one, I found delicious salted cookies with pumpkin seeds. I also saw a lot of dried fruits, like bananas, as well as fresh vegetables and such. Which are not items you don't commonly find at regular konbini.

You can easily keep the budget for a konbini meal under €10. I even managed to get lunch for €5, drink included. I know this article is a little shorter than my usual ones, but with konbini, the photos speak for themselves :).







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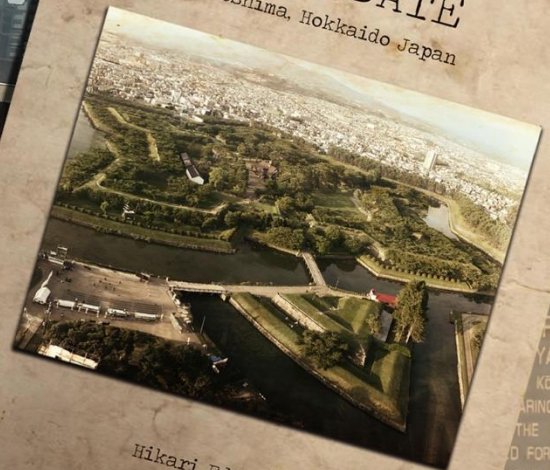
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Introduction

The term *kawaii*, denoting the Japanese cuteness culture, needs no introduction to our readers. It's the fashions we wear, the manga we read, and the objects we decorate our lives with. The cuteness of big-eyed mascots and childlike innocence defines them. Among this colourful world, *kawaii* has taken a turn for the dark. Japanese youth have decided to add a drop of poison to their styles. As these fashion trends are finding their way to the rest of the world, they've sparked occasional controversies due to misunderstandings and cultural differences. This article attempts to offer an overview of these dark *kawaii* evolutions, while addressing a few common misconceptions.

Kawaii (かわいい)

Contrary to its cute looks and current commercialism, the original *kawaii* culture shows similarities to our Western Punk movement. The aesthetic knows its origins in the 1970's. It was prompted by female students disrupting common order by using cute handwriting in schools. Throughout the 1980's and 1990's, *kawaii* became a sign of youth rebelling against the expectations the previous generation burdened them with. Instead of growing up, and taking on the restrictive roles of housewives and businessmen society wished for them, Japanese youth decided to postpone this bleak future, and to revel in their youth. As this subculture became mainstream over time, *kawaii* grew into an important part of the overarching Japanese popular culture. Fashion is never stagnant. When we keep in mind *kawaii*'s origins as a rebellious youth movement, it's not surprising that its modern adepts are now exploring its shadow side. A subculture named *menhera* (mental health) has played a crucial role in the development of *kawaii*'s darker side. Along with it, two new aesthetics have come about: *yumekawaii* (dreamy cute) and *yamikawaii* (sickly cute). As both are substyles of an overarching fashion movement, a strong overlap exists between them. The following paragraphs aim to define *menhera*, and to explain the distinguishing features of *yumekawaii* and *yamikawaii*.

The origins of Menhera (メンヘラ)

Japan faces some of the world's highest suicide rates. Despite this fact, mental health and disability remain taboo topics in Japanese society. With no place to turn to due to social stigma, those who suffer have found each other within an artistic subculture: *menhera*. The *menhera* movement, as popularised by designer *Kuua Oyasumi*, is an attempt at externalising dark feelings and invisible illnesses. It aims to enable discussion about them.



Slur or subculture?

Menhera is somewhat of a controversial term. Some claim it to be a slur against those suffering from mental illnesses, while others use it as a name for their fashion style. The truth lies in between both statements. While *menhera* may seem like a relatively new trend to the Western J-Fashion enthusiast, the community from which it emerged, has been around since the year 2000. The term *menhera* originates from a *2channel* community populated by users searching to better their mental health. It's a contraction of the words *mental health*, and is a term these users coined for themselves. Used in this way, *menhera* serves to name a subculture dedicated to leading a happy life while dealing with mental health problems, chronic illnesses, or invisible disabilities. As mental health is still a big source of taboo in Japan, the general population has started to use the term *menhera*, as coined by these mental healthers, as a slur against those who suffer from mental health issues. Especially the term *menhera-kei* (with the suffix *kei* (系) used as someone belonging to a specific group) is used against young women who are seen as attention seekers, or who are equated to the fictional *yandere* trope. It's used in a similar way as English slurs such as *psycho* or *insane*. Despite these generalised connotations, the word *menhera* originally was AND still is the title of a subculture. Contrary to popular belief, *menhera* does not intend to glorify mental illness. Neither does it try to popularise self-harm. In fact, quite the opposite is true. The movement wants to show that everyone, regardless of looks, can suffer inside. By visualising mental health problems, the subculture opens up the topic for discussion. It offers a healthy coping outlet, and enables sufferers to find like-minded people, and seek help.

Fashion

By definition, every subculture eventually develops a dress code of its own. *Menhera* is no different in this regard. This is where *yumekawaii* and *yamikawaii* come into play. These aesthetics can be seen as substyles of *menhera*. They are two sides of the same coin: *yumekawaii* is a dreamy, escapist world with a drop of poison, while *yamikawaii* is cuteness tainted by darkness. *Menhera*'s central style focus is *vent art*: art made to externalise someone's inner struggles. Because of this, the fashion associated with this subculture is very print focussed. The main subject is illness (in all meanings of the word). Therefore, common themes are medication, pain, decay, depression, hospital visits, suicide, and self-harm. A famous example of *menhera* vent art is *Ezaki Bisuko's* manga *Menhera-chan*. Its main character, a magical girl who protects the world from darkness, transforms into her alter ego by cutting her wrists. The *kawaii* box cutter *Menhera-chan* employs for this, serves as her transformation wand: a common trope in *mahou shoujo* manga. Besides medical themes, popular motives are protective symbols such as the *kagome crest* or a crucifix, and *kanji*

depicting negative words such as sickness. Outfits usually consist of oversized tops combined with barely visible bottoms such as mini-skirts. These are worn alongside printed legwear: especially thigh high socks are popular. Subtle bondage gear, pill-shaped jewellery, mouth masks, and printed rosettes are used as accessories. The wearers are often seen sporting platforms or sneakers as footwear. Make-up is subdued in menhera, as the style is meant to be comfortable and easy to wear. Therefore, there is no defining make-up style, and many even choose to go bare-faced. When make-up is worn, the most popular style is *byojaku*: a type of heavy under-eye blush modelled after the flush one gets when suffering through a fever.



Origins of yumekawaii

Originally, yumekawaii (dreamy cute) was a catch-all term for all kawaii fashions using pastel colour schemes. As yamikawaii rose to its fame, yumekawaii adopted more specific themes to counterbalance yamikawaii. Today, yumekawaii is used in both definitions. This article focuses on yumekawaii as yamikawaii's twin aesthetic. Ever wanted to escape into your television towards a fairy-tale world run by magical girls? Are *Sailor Moon* and *Creamy Mami* your heroes? This type of nostalgic escapism defines the dreamlike world of yumekawaii. The style combines pastels with popular mahou shoujo anime from the 1980's. Don't confuse its cutesiness for innocence: yumekawaii is about rejecting the pessimistic world we live in, and escaping into childhood bliss.

Fashion points of yumekawaii

Yumekawaii uses pastel colours. Its prints and accessories commonly look towards magical girl manga for inspiration, borrowing elements such as sailor collars or transformation wands. Cutesy things such as wings, clouds, stars, unicorns, and others accompany them. Fairy-tale themes are also popular. As the aesthetic is well aware of its cynical nature, darker elements denoting mental health can also be spotted among its wearers.



Origins of yamikawaii

No matter how cute you dress, your suffering remains. However, if you're feeling miserable, you might as well lift your spirits a little by feeling cute, too. Yamikawaii (sickly cute) is the more confrontational style of the yume/yami twins. Rather than escaping into fantasy, yamikawaii visualises the wearers' invisible struggles by (quite literally) allowing them to wear their hearts on their sleeves. This leads to a dress code which outsiders may find shocking, but which makes the wearer recognisable to others who deal with the same issues (as is common in subculture fashion), signalling they are not alone in their struggles.

Fashion points of yamikawaii

The central idea of this aesthetic is to depict dark or shocking topics by using cute imagery. Prints are therefore essential, and usually show forms of vent art. Common elements are pills, hospital emblems, syringes, nooses, band-aids, razor blades, spoons,...: visuals alluding to illness, decay, depression, self-harm, or even suicide. It's a common misconception that yamikawaii must use dark colours only. While black combined with pastels is the most prominent colour scheme, an outfit is defined yamikawaii based on its themes rather than colours.

Conclusion

Not all that is cute denotes happiness and bliss. Japan's kawaii culture has embraced its shadow side. Staying true to its rebellious origins, Japanese youth are using kawaii to visualise their internal struggles through vent art and fashion. A subculture titled menhera brings these elements together. Paired with it, the aesthetics yumekawaii and yamikawaii offer ways for its members to express themselves. These fashions enable discussion on taboo subjects such as mental health and disability.

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 Text: Lora-Elly Vannieuwenhuysen
 Photography: Brite-Tan (instagram.com/brite.heart), Hilde Heyvaert, Kuua Oyasumi (instagram.com/kuua_oyasumi), Bert Van den Wyngaert



**In the shadow
of cute:
yamikawaii**















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EVENT REVIEW: *Legends of the Force*



Event: Legends of the Force

What: Star Wars event at Disneyland Paris

When: January 12 - March 17 2019

Where: Walt Disney Studios Park, Disneyland Paris, Marne-la-Vallée, France

Ticket price: very, very varied;
depending on the formula

Website: www.disneylandparis.com

For the 3rd year in a row, Disneyland Paris organised their *Star Wars* celebration in the *Walt Disney Studios Park*. Renaming it from *Season of the Force* to *Legends of the Force*. We visited the event for a day early in February, just before the school holiday madness began, so this is a review of an off season experience, as when we visited the park wasn't crowded at all and the weather was really nice.

As with everything Disneyland Paris, this event had its **good and bad points**. But luckily more of them were good.

Because they are very well aware that not everyone loves *Star Wars*, the event was mostly contained to *Production Courtyard*. Some of the food trucks were rebranded *Galactic Canteen*, selling *Star Wars* waffles, *Tie Fighter* cookies, *Yoda* cakes and other themed foods, as well as the popcorn buckets. Which sold out and barely got restocked. As far as other merch went, it was mostly stuff you could get year 'round. With exception of a really bad quality print event t-shirt. On-site hotel guests could request a special event button at the lobby of their hotel, giving them an exclusive memento of the event.

Darth Vader does meet and greets pretty much all year in the *Disneyland Park*, so for this event, a *Chewbacca* meet and greet was set-up, which was well worth the wait. The bonus was that for this meet, people did not need a *lineberty app* reservation.

Another hit point was the mixing of both classic *Star Wars* and new *Star Wars*. Shows such as *Galactic Celebration* and *Legends of a Galaxy Far, Far Away* contained elements of both and several times a day, guests could check out the *First Order March*, headed by *Phasma* or the *Imperial March*, headed by *Vader*, both accompanied by a small show on the *Star Wars* stage in front of *Tower of Terror*.

A very nice touch was the jazz band playing *Star Wars* songs in *Studio 1*. Sadly they were not listed on the program, so unless you wandered passed and stumbled upon them, you couldn't know there would be live *Star Wars* music. *Studio 1* is known for having live bands, and generally there are performance times outside the stage with instruments, so make sure to keep an eye on those!

Now for the downsides. It's great that they have further expanded their themed snacks and meals. But some of these looked like zero effort had been put into them. This especially goes for the *Yoda* and *Chewbacca* ones. Whilst you now had two *Star Wars* menu options instead of one, they were served at *Au Coullisse*, a restaurant that is known to be very hit or miss. When we ate there, we were the only ones in the queue, they didn't get the order right, the fries were cold and the burger was barely lukewarm. This is unacceptable. That's not the only food related issue. Whilst we understand that especially during low season it's normal that not every restaurant is open, the fact that most people had to eat outside in February was simply not on. Not even on a nice day.

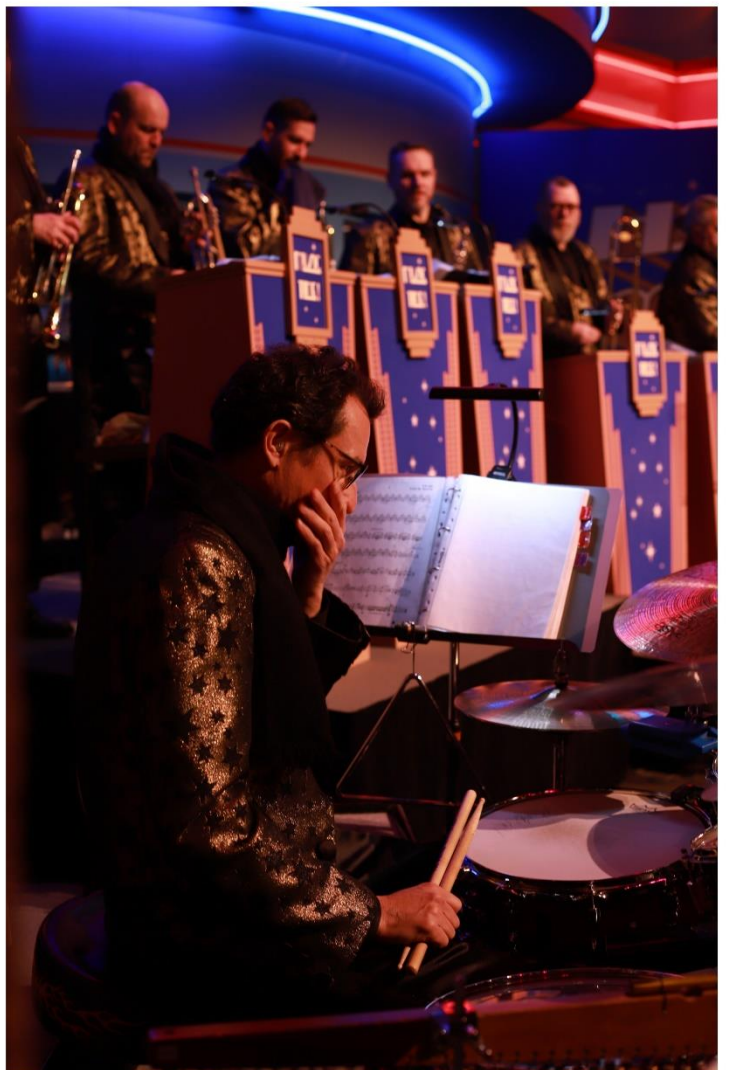
Whilst there were quite a few things on offer, 2 small shows/marches, a show and a projection show as well as a meet and greet, it still felt pretty limited because everything was stuffed together and felt rather repetitive. *The Studio Theatre* was right opposite the stage where all the *Star Wars* shows took place, so we were at a loss why they didn't make sure of it, as it was just sitting there empty. Why not hold performances of *Jedi Academy*? Or a whole new show still, or heck, showings of *Star Wars* movies! Especially on bad weather days it would get people out of the cold, and it would be an extra cool thing for the ticket cost.

Speaking of ticket cost. For an additional fee of €59, which is more expensive than an adult mini ticket at €53 you could get an add on to your ticket called *Star Wars Celebration+*. Which in true Disneyland Paris style, was all sorts of vague. The info was only made available in French, and booking it was rather vague as well, just causing confusion. But basically, you paid an extra fee just for faster access to *Star Wars* themed rides (*Star Tours* and *Hyperspace Mountain*), *Darth Vader* meet and greet (not *Chewbacca*) and a special VIP spot for *Galactic Celebration* as well as an exclusive button and lanyard. Which frankly is ridiculously overpriced. First of all, if you go during low season, you don't need the special fast pass access because queue times are short to start with. Secondly, you would have to pay considerably more for a two park ticket, provided you are not staying on site, just to be able to enjoy all of these things, as the rides and meet are all in the *Disneyland Park*. It's a great idea to tie both parks together, but this is not the way to go about it. The add on is a great idea, but it's far too expensive for what it is, and the communication surrounding it is woefully lacking, especially for a resort such as *Disneyland Paris*, who have the means and manpower to do better.

All in all, if you are a *Star Wars* fan, *Legends of the Force* is definitely worth doing once. During low season because if it's crowded, it'll be very hellish. Whilst it was mostly an excellent event, some work needs to be done to fine tune it, and *Disney* has the opportunity to do so. Let's just hope that by next year's edition, they will!

Review by Hilde Heyvaert.
Photography by ED92, Hilde Heyvaert and Bert Van den Wyngaert.







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Event: Pirates and Princesses
What: seasonal event at Disneyland Paris
When: January 19 - March 17 2019
Where: Disneyland Park, Disneyland Paris, Marne-la-Vallée, France
Ticket price: very, very varied; depending on the formula
Website: www.disneylandparis.com

Pirates and Princesses has been a pretty popular feature of the Disneyland Park, more or less replacing Swing into Spring. #teampirates and #teamprincesses sort of battle it out, trying to get guests to pick their side, with shows, floats and assorted fun. We visited on an off season nice weather Friday early February, so this review is of a low crowd kind of day with pretty ideal weather.

Pirates and Princesses is pretty much composed out of three main events: the *Princess Promenade*, where several times a day, *Sophia the First* and *Elena of Avalor*, accompanied by several dancers, make their way all around *Central Plaza*. It's a fun repeat routine of two different dance sequences that is fun to see even if you watch neither show.

Team Pirates also have a show, which takes place on a strip of stage in front of *Captain Hook's Galley* (the pirate ship) in *Adventureland*. It's mostly for kids, where *Jack Sparrow* and pirate friends introduce children to pirate life. It's got pretty limited visibility all in all and if you like photographing shows, this is not the one for you.

The last one is probably the most popular and best known one, *Make Your Choice*, combining shows and floats. It starts (or ends, that's a little vague) out with a show on the *Fantasyland Castle Stage*, featuring the Princesses, *Mickey Mouse* as a Prince, *Betty Rose* (she's with them but there is very little explanation about her) and several dancers in front of the stage (making it pretty hard to get clear shots of the stage show). That sequence takes place simultaneously with the departure of the pirate float at the other end. Both floats have a show stop on *Main Street*, and another stop at *Central Plaza*, where there are small performances of princesses and pirates on three different smaller stages. At the same time as acrobatics are performed on the pirate float, which has a built in trampoline and areal rope for such purposes. Especially the acrobatics are well worth watching.

As you might have gathered, the event is rather heavy on the princess side. A nice touch is that all the princesses and most of the pirate characters have gotten new, extra brightly coloured, outfits specifically for this event. Even though with the added dancers and extra

characters, it does tend to look a little like *Tokyo Disney's* Easter on illicit substances.

If there are issues with a show or float, it will be cancelled, and there is zero replacement. When we were there, there was an issue with a float, meaning that only one full performance of *Make Your Choice* happened, they had the floats cross for the second, and that was that for the entire day. We can understand that there are situations outside of Disneyland Paris' control. However, there are 4 show stages in total, so we find it impossible to understand why they can't simply perform parts or a single part rather than cancel the whole thing (inclement weather is of course a good reason not to as safety is important, but when we were there it was excellent weather).

Contrary to *Legends of the Force*, which mostly runs simultaneously with *Pirates and Princesses* in the *Walt Disney Studios Park*, there were no themed snacks, no special menus, no special merch other than two very gendered t-shirts (princesses for girls/women, pirates for boys/men, even though Mickey is on #teamprincesses and Minnie on #teampirates). It was pretty much those three shows, 2 t-shirts and another button exclusive to hotel guests. Which seems like a lot of missed opportunities really, as the event is quite popular and a lot of people are really into pirates and princesses. Especially princesses. The fact that the *Princess Pavilion* had quite likely the longest waiting time in the entire park when we were there should be proof of that. Had they set up meet and greets with the princesses in their special outfits in there and on several other locations, it would have been beyond popular. It was a fun event to be sure, but it could have been much, much better.

Whilst for *Legends of the Force*, they had done the effort to make the event disability friendly, this wasn't the case for *Pirates and Princesses*. Obviously, logistically it would be a little harder, with the different show stops and performance points. However, it was absolutely not impossible to organise, nor set-up. So it is really rather unacceptable Disney neglected to do so. Disney does do a lot of amazing things to accommodate people with disabilities, and in a lot of ways they succeed above and beyond, and the amount of things they do is stellar, but there is room for improvement. This is one of those situations where that's the case.

Basically, if you only have one day and can only visit one park whilst *Pirates and Princesses* and *Legends of the Force* both run, pick the *Walt Disney Studios Park* and their *Star Wars* celebration if you're a huge *Star Wars* fan.

If you're all about the rides, pick the park which has the most rides you find appealing and ignore the special events.

When it comes to these two, *Legends of the Force* is definitely much more and much better organised and much more expansive in terms of food, merch and even meet and greets. *Pirates and Princesses* feels like it hasn't reached it potential yet, and there's a lot of missed opportunities involved.

Review by Hilde Heyvaert. Photography by ED92, Hilde Heyvaert and Bert Van den Wyngaert.







Event: Comic Con Brussels
What: popculture convention
When: March 2 & 3 2019
Where: Tour & Taxis, Brussels, Belgium
Ticket price: varied, depending on the formula
Website: comiconbrussels.be

For the 4th year in a row, *Comic Con Brussels* took place at *Tour & Taxis*. The organisation behind this event has done an impressive job cultivating this relatively young convention into something worthy of the title Comic Con. Unfortunately, this year's edition seemed to suffer from its own success. Note that BCM was present on Sunday and therefore cannot judge Saturday's events.

Just like last year, Comic Con Brussels offered large maps and magazine-like programmes detailing when and where which activities took place, which facilitated navigating the convention grounds. However, the crowd present on Sunday was so large that working your way through it formed quite the feat. While it was not at Made in Asia's infamous proportions yet, it was starting to show problems. Mostly when it came to actually moving around, otherwise, you could still look at shops and thankfully safety was not compromised. The fragmented floorplan worsened the situation. For example, the fan booths were spread out across the event instead of being grouped together, and the artist alley intermingled with the guest signing lines, which resulted in confusion. We hope the organisers will find a solution to this problem. Otherwise, this will end up becoming a serious issue. It does need to be said that it became significantly less busy around 2PM, so if you just want to pop over to shop, meet a guest or have a look around taking everything in, coming in the afternoon might work out for you.

One of Comic Con's strong suits is the variety of available activities the event has to offer. One such common activity consists of meeting celebrities. This year's guest list hosted a collection of big names, including *Billie Piper*, *Michelle Gomez*, *Joonas Suotamo*, and *Nick Frost*, just to name a few. Visitors could meet their heroes, take part in Q&A's, and have their pictures taken with them. As always, fan clubs represented their passions at their booths. Their number keeps growing every year, making it easier than ever to meet like-minded people. If you have other preferences, you could go shopping, visit the silent disco, check out the movie vehicles exhibition, enjoy pop culture panoramas, attend workshops and cosplay Q&A's, etc. The variety is definite-

ly one of Comic Con's strong points, and the ever growing visitor number is proof of that. The organisation just has to be very careful at this stage not to fall victim to its own success and maintain this level of quality.

Belgian conventions are hosting a wider variety of activities each year, and Comic Con Brussels is no exception to this. This surge of creativity is worth encouraging. However, this event hosted one specific activity we question. Conventions often offer temporary tattoos, which is fine. This year however, an actual tattoo studio took part, and offered genuine tattoos on the spot. Is it wise to offer permanent body modifications that require specific health considerations and aftercare at an event like this? Personally, we would like to recommend people to put in the proper research into shops and tattooists before just getting inked, so in our opinion this wasn't the greatest idea.

The marketplace available at Comic Con Brussels offered a wide variety of goods that catered to both a mainstream audience and to the more passionate collectors. We spotted no obvious bootleg shops, and scalping attempts of *AliExpress*/*Taobao* goods were limited in number. The focus of goods laid with Western popular culture, which may have disappointed manga and Jculture fans. However, there's always *Japan Con*, which is organised by the same crew as Comic Con Brussels.

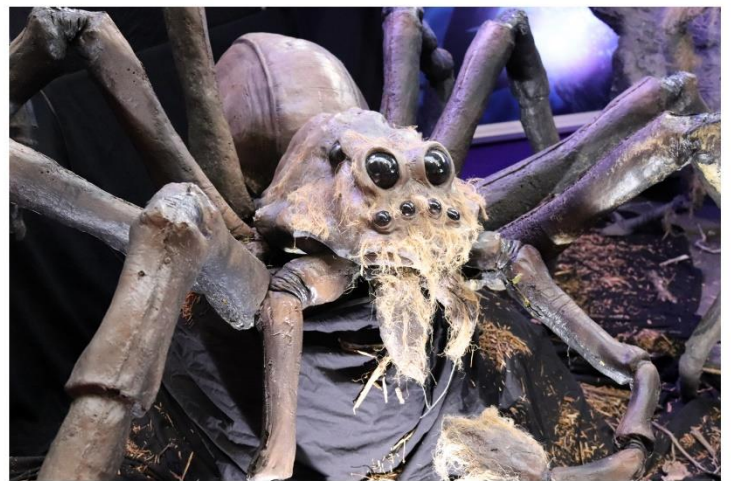
Food used to be a sensitive topic at Belgian conventions, with problems ranging from high prices, the inability to bring your own food, to a lack of space to sit down and eat. Comic Con Brussels does a good job at circumventing these issues. Each year, the event invites a set of food trucks, ensuring there's a fair variety of snacks available. Once you had acquired your food, you could set out towards the *NomNomNom hall*, a calm spot with seating available to take a break and enjoy your lunch. Aside from that, you're free to bring your own lunch. There were no mandatory bag checks this year, something a lot of people despise, but of course we can't predict whether or not this will also be the case next year.

Comic Con Brussels works hard at avoiding the language issues, which Brussels conventions traditionally suffer from. They do so by using English as their primary language, instead of stubbornly choosing between either Dutch or French. The Comic Con Brussels website is trilingual, and a variety of both activities and goods were available in different languages. Even most vendors were able to speak at least two languages, so even if you couldn't communicate in your own, you were likely to be able to do so in English.

While some new issues have popped up, most noteworthy the chaos and crowdedness, this year's Comic Con Brussels was still a good convention. Its organisation is known for taking its problems in its stride and finding solutions by the following edition. Judging by the way this event has evolved throughout the past four years, We have faith that next year's event will step up its game and iron out the proverbial kinks. We're already looking forward to the 2020 edition in any case!

Review by Hilde Heyvaert and Lora-Ely Vannieuwenhuysen. Photography by Hilde Heyvaert and Bert Van den Wyngaert.







COMIC CON *Antwerp*

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Event: Made in Asia, 11th edition
+ YouPlay!, 4th edition
What: Asiamania + gaming convention
When: March 8-10 2019
Where: Brussels Expo, Laeken (Brussels), Belgium
Ticket price: €10-15, depending on the formula
Website: www.madeinasia.be

Made in Asia is a well-established Brussels Asiamania convention with a focus on Japan, and to a lesser extent the rest of Asia. Its 11th edition took place at *Brussels Expo*, the convention's regular venue. Just like during the past 4 years, the event joined forces with the gaming convention *YouPlay!*. *YouPlay!* comes at no extra cost, as the two blended seamlessly into each other. Between the two of us we visited all three days of the event.

Throughout the years, *Made in Asia* has gathered infamy due to its mixed reviews. Overcrowding, safety problems, theft, sexual harassment, and language barriers are common issues that pop up each year. While some editions are decent and try to counter these problems, others are downright disastrous. Now that *Made in Asia* has switched ownership (it is now owned by EasyFairs of FACTS fame) we aren't actually surprised that in reality, very little has changed.

The Crowd at *Made in Asia* is usually so large, it warrants being written with a capital "C". Navigating through it often feels like a sentient creature is trying to crush you into its next meal. This has a huge effect on one's experience of the convention. This year's edition was a slight improvement on the previous edition, mainly due to the manageable mass of the Crowd, on Sunday at least, as on Saturday the Crowd was indeed very much an issue. Despite the school holiday, the Friday was a breath of fresh air and the Crowd was nowhere in sight, probably warming up for its strike on Saturday. Intersections between paths were still hotspots you did not want to be stuck in during the weekend, unless you enjoy moving shoulder to shoulder at a snail's pace. There was one hall we had to skip entirely; it was overflowing with people, which made it outright dangerous to enter. However, given *Made in Asia's* usual Crowd, 2019 still made for a relatively calm edition. On Friday and Sunday at least.

The language issues that *Made in Asia* traditionally suffers from were present as ever. The convention's programme was only available in French, both off- and online, many activities were French-only, and the Dutch-language texts displayed on the offi-

cial website and *Made in Asia's* social media needed work. The cosplay competition on Saturday did a little better, as did most bands performing, as they spoke English. But the panels were still a dreadfully boring French only experience. Some steps were taken to counter this problem, though. We encountered more bilingual staff than usual (shout out to *YouPlay!*'s board game staff and the Nintendo crew for being trilingual!), and the signs that hung throughout the convention were bilingual, too.

Made in Asia hosted two anime industry giants this year: veterans *Takahiro Yoshimatsu* (*Dragon Ball*, *Hunter x Hunter* 2011) and *Yoshiharu Sato* (Studio Ghibli, World Masterpiece Theater) were present to meet their fans. Those more musically inclined could attend concerts by *GOOD THRU DATE*, *Fate Gear*, and kazoo artist *Tsuko G*. French-speaking visitors could also meet their favourite YouTubers at *YouPlay!*. There was a distinct absence of Flemish or English speaking YouTubers, once again underlining the skewed language barrier. Just like last year, the preliminaries for the *World Cosplay Summit 2019* took place at *MiA*, which offered a chance to see some impressive crafters at work.

During its earlier editions, *Made in Asia* was known for its multitude of activities. Throughout the years, the focus shifted to shopping, but it seems *MiA* is trying to balance things out again. The Japanese village of old returned and offered thematic workshops such as calligraphy, go, and shogi. Gamers, both table-top and digital, could try out new titles at *YouPlay!*. Other activities such as karaoke, quizzes, workshops, a Studio Ghibli village, and even two escape rooms made for fun ways to spend time as well.

Shopping remains the main activity at *MiA* with the main focus on manga and popculture. A few vendors even sold legitimate J-Fashion items: a rarity at Belgian conventions. Despite these positive points, the problems *MiA* has struggled with for years still stand. We saw plenty of bootleg, fashion replicas, and a ton of scandalously overpriced AliExpress/Taobao resellers. As always, most available language-based items, such as books and board games, were solely aimed at French visitors. We were glad to see the food court return, which is an improvement of recent years. Unfortunately, it shared a hall with the main stage. It offered a spot to rest your feet (though not your ears), and to buy a decent variety of food.

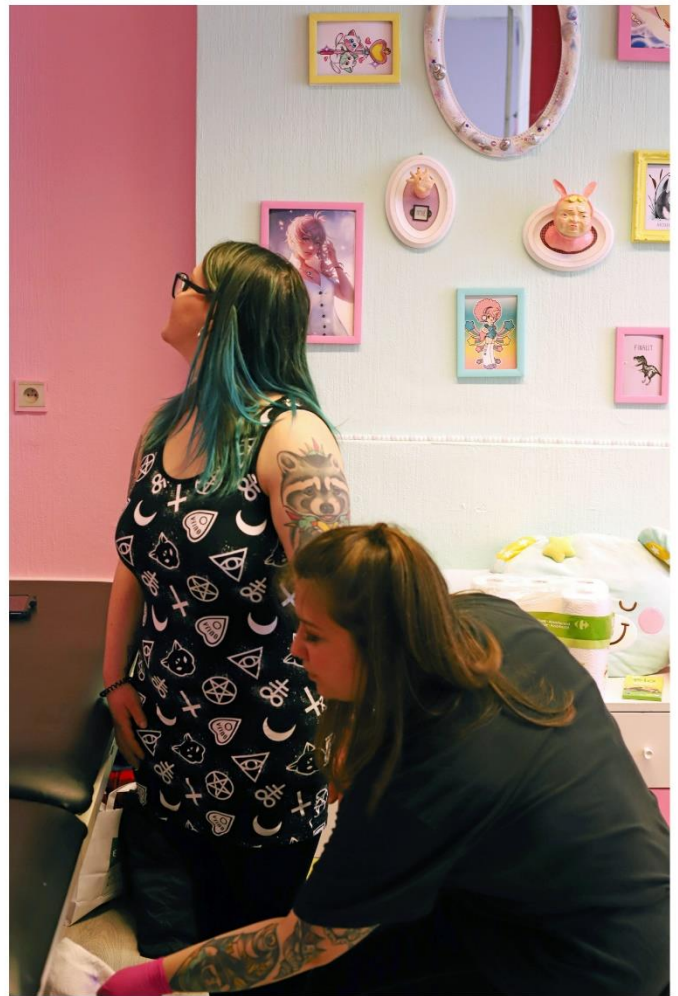
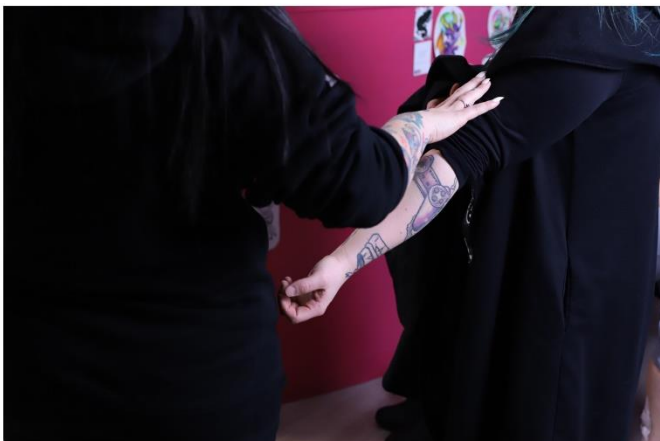
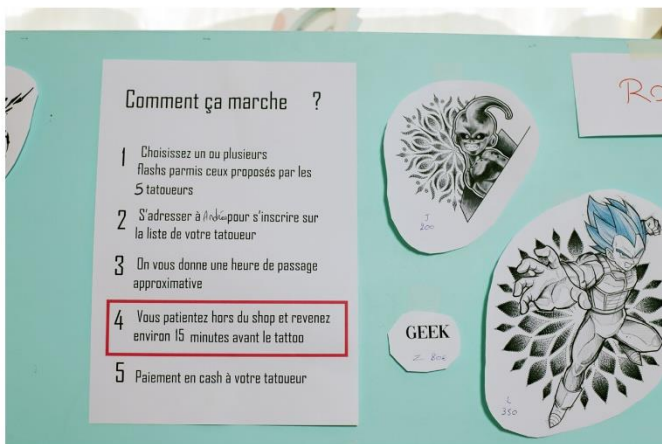
Despite the relative calm of this edition on two out of three days, we still advise against visiting *MiA* if you have mobility issues, if you're accompanied by small children, or simply don't like big Crowds. While I personally noticed fewer malicious photographers and people abusing free hug signs for ill-intended purposes compared to past years, we would still recommend remaining vigilant, especially against sexual harassment, when visiting in 2020. These are issues *Made in Asia* has struggled with for years, and a few small *Cosplay is not Consent* posters are not enough to eradicate them. We know our hopes have been dashed before, but we express careful optimism that *Made in Asia* will keep working on the improvements it desperately needs. We're curious to see what the 2020 edition will bring us in any case.

Review by Hilde Heyvaert and Lora-Ely Vannieuwenhuysen. Photography by Hilde Heyvaert and Bert Van den Wyngaert.





Flash days are a more or less regular event in several tattoo shops. We dropped by one held at **Coup de Foudre** tattoo in Liège, Belgium, for their video games themed flash day on Sunday, March 10th. Of course we also spoke to some people gathered there, getting tattooed themselves or accompanying friends. Speaking to some people there, the reasons were varied for getting tattooed on a flash day. Some people were there to get work done by a specific artist who's work they admired a lot. Several of them already had several tattoos by that artist and were looking to get more. Others came because Sunday was their only day off, and thus making a regular appointment wasn't an option for them. And others came because it seemed like a fun spur of the moment thing to do. Whichever the reason why to be there, all of them had looked at all the flash sheets previously published on the artists' instagram accounts and already knew what they wanted to get. It was a really fun and friendly event, with people socialising and having an awesome time whilst getting tattooed. And clearly we can't talk about other shops, but a Coup de Foudre flash day is definitely the place to be if you're into getting something done a little more spur of the moment.



EVENT REVIEW: Cirque du Soleil
Toruk, the First Flight

Event: Toruk, the First Flight

What: Cirque du Soleil spectacle

When: March 13-17 2019

Where: Sportpaleis, Antwerp, Belgium

Ticket price: depending on the seating you wanted

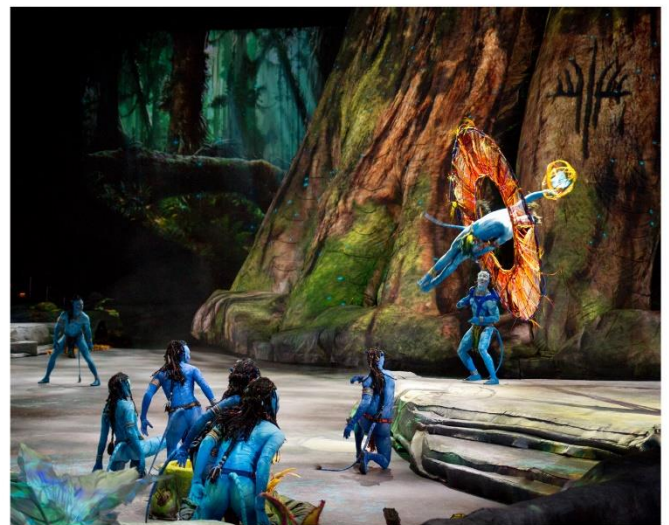
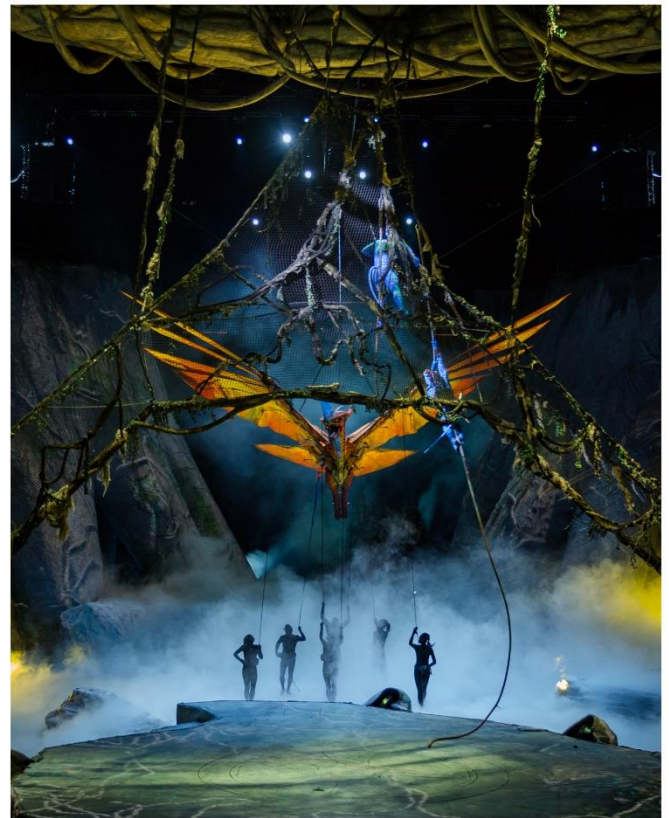
Website: www.cirquedusoleil.com/toruk

Based on *James Cameron's* hit movie *Avatar*, *Toruk* takes you to *Pandora*. Telling the coming of age story of three young Na'vi, on a quest to save their sacred tree with the help of all the tribes on the planet.

Much like all *Cirque du Soleil* spectacles, this is visually beautiful. A little more monochrome, though never monotonous, than what you would expect, and definitely less circus like. The amount of acrobatics and stunt work is also much more limited, due to the particular story.

So I definitely wouldn't say that this is Cirque du Soleil as you would expect them. That doesn't mean, however, that this show is less amazing. Especially not if you're an *Avatar* fan. They do a good job portraying the Na'vi, and other creatures that live on Pandora, even with the restriction of smaller stages. Because Cirque du Soleil is a visual event rather than anything else: let's switch to pictures!

Review by Hilde Heyvaert. Photography by Cirque du Soleil and Bert Van den Wyngaert





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Event: The Great Gatsby

What: immersive musical theatre

When: March - May 2019

Where: Viage, Brussels, Belgium

Ticket price: €59

Website: www.gatsbybelgium.be

After over three years of overwhelming success, *The Great Gatsby*, the immersive musical theatre, came from the West End of London (where it is still running) to Belgium with shows in French, Dutch and English in the heart of Brussels. There's singing, dancing, and well... Gatsby.

This play is immersive in the true sense of the word as visitors can get up and move around in the four different areas of the performance building. They can dance, sing and interact with the characters. The characters will often take people apart and interact with them fairly one on one, or in a larger setting. Introverts don't be alarmed, they have a very keen eye for those that rather not get involved and prefer to be spectators, so no one is put on the spot. If you prefer to stay in the main room and not interact, that's totally fine, and as there is always a lot going on, you won't even miss out on that many things. You will miss out on some of course, but it's not like you won't get your money's worth of play.

We can't speak for the French version, as we have only seen the Dutch one, but the adaptation from the English book to a Dutch interactive play, is really, really well done. Whilst the London cast is coming down to Belgium to perform here for a week, the French and Dutch language casts have been specially selected for those language versions, with adapted lines to include both modern day and Jazz age colloquialisms. And it works. Allowances have also been made when it comes to *F. Scott Fitzgerald's* novel. As the events of the book span a whole summer, and the play takes place on one specific night and event: a party thrown by *Jay Gatsby*. They have clearly taken measures to keep the spirit of the novel alive and it really showed. You are basically walking into a Jazz age party, and like at a big party, you can explore the venue (to a degree) and interact with others.

The entire venue has been dressed up to be part of the era as much as possible, so you really feel like you are in a vintage 1920s establishment. Dressing up isn't mandatory, but it is certainly encouraged. And most people do, which definitely adds to the atmosphere. Even the drinks are old timey, ranging from sodas to cocktails (you can pay with your bank card though, as an allowance to modern days). For those coming by car, you can buy a €5 ticket for Parking De Munt at the bar, so that significantly cuts back your parking costs. Just a side note. As they are keeping everything as authentic as possible, cell phones are not permitted. That's not to say there aren't areas set-up where you can take an outfit shot or a selfie, but it's not possible during the actual play.

Tickets are going fast, and only 200 places are available per showing, so if you're into musical theatre and Jazz Age, grab yours whilst you can for one of the few remaining shows. If you weren't lucky enough to attend this time, definitely go if (and hopefully that's when) the play returns!

Review by Hilde Heyvaert. Photography by Hilde Heyvaert and Bert Van den Wyngaert



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Event: Photo Days
What: photography convention
When: March 15-17 2019
Where: Brussels Expo, Laeken (Brussels), Belgium
Ticket price: depending on the formula
Website: www.photodays.be

Traditionally, *Photo Days* shares the space with *Drone Days*, we are not talking about that though, even though some of them looked pretty impressive (on a side note, what was the military even doing there? Am I the only one that thinks it's a bad idea to just display what you have if you take it on missions?). Even though it's a 3 day event, we only visited the Sunday.

Photo Days is Belgium's premiere professional photography convention. That's not to say that a passionate hobbyist has no business being there. On the contrary. Even if you are just interested in finding out what the best Instax choice is for your personally, it's worth the visit. Every large brand has a significantly sized booth at the event, displaying their latest and upcoming models, and often also their full range of upscale models. But in case of *Fujifilm*, also their full range of *Instax*, and they're not the only ones bringing more than just the pro gear. Aside from that there are tons of stores that are focussed on printing and accessories. So if you're in the market for a good camera bag and such, being able to really see what they're about before buying online really helps.

To top it off, a lot of companies, *Canon* in particular, will allow you try out cameras and lenses, giving you the opportunity to really hands on experience what is the best fit for you personally. There are also lectures, workshops and the opportunity to photograph models in little studio set-ups, which brings me to the following... This is not about the major brands, because as far as we could see on Sunday, they had all brought in models for traditional shoots, cosplay (the *Deadpool* cosplayer was really good!) and circus shoots, or to do sports photography. Which is great opportunities, because a lot of people who are passionate about photography but not professional photographers don't have a home studio, nor the funds to work with models. It also gives people the chance to test various studio equipment, which is very good for those wanting to invest in a studio, or simply wanting to try something else entirely. That said, there's always at least one shop, and just looking at the photos with this review you will know exactly what I'm talking about, who feels the need to hire "alternative models".

And whilst we most definitely do not (let's make that very clear) want to throw shade at the models, I can't help but wonder why on earth it's necessary to put models in skimpy outfits, or fetishized bad cosplay/"sexy" Halloween outfits. Last year, we griped about the exact same thing. Especially because it attracted a large number of creep photographers who would also bother female visitors if they felt the need to do so. And sadly they did... a lot.

Now, it must be said that the number of creep photographers had significantly gone down this year. Not only because the security was extra aware of the issue, but also because Photo Days had undergone somewhat of a make-over. Whilst it used to clearly look a little chaotic and amateuristic, especially compared to its larger counterparts in France and Germany, this year, it had turned into something best described as a miniature *Photokina* (the immensely large and globally renowned photography convention). That alone seemed to have scared off the vast majority of creep photographers. Or maybe they had just all given up by the last day when we were there, who knows, but the fact is they weren't their usual toxic persistent presence and that's what counts.

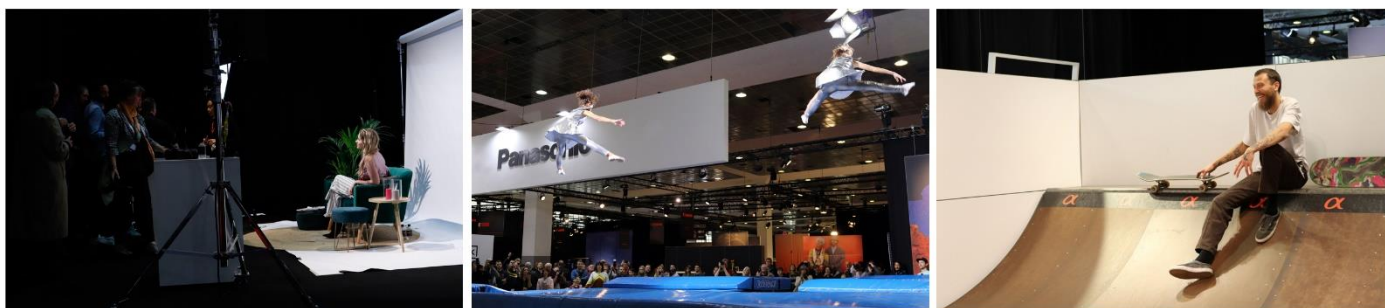
It also made the convention much more pleasant and easier to navigate. And look actually professional. This did mean that a lot of the fun features had vanished. Out of the handful of photobooths, only one remained. Fujifilm did still offer people the opportunity to have a free Instax (Square) photo taken, as well as some printing fun. For the latter, however, you had to download an app (GDPR compliant) and turn on your GPS. Which is not something a lot of people are comfortable with. But if you are, good times were ensured, the wifi signal at the convention was stable and free to use for visitors and if you had photos on your phone, you could have a good time at the booth.

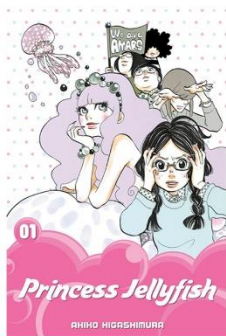
If you were there to just take photos, or find out about new stuff or simply what was best to buy for you personally, you could also find ways to really enjoy the day.

Food and drinks were available inside the hall, but as far as we know, you were allowed to bring your own. We didn't that day, so we can't attest whether or not that's the case, but we did see a few people with their own, so that's why we're hazarding the assumption.

All in all, Photo Days has come a long way, for the best. It's great that they cater to hobby photographers as well as professionals. If now they could only sort out the model issue, it'd be a perfect event for those passionate about photography!

Review and photography by Hilde Heyvaert and Bert Van den Wyngaert.





Akiko Higashimura
"Princess Jellyfish"
"Kuragehime"

Tsukimi Kurashita lives a peaceful life in Amamizukan, an apartment building she shares with her fellow female NEET friends. One day, the tenants get wind of plans to demolish the building. Tsukimi teams up with Kuranosuke, the crossdressing son of a local politician. As Tsukimi loves jellyfish, they establish a fashion brand named Jellyfish in the hopes of earning enough money to save Amamizukan from destruction.

The story is engaging, even heart-warming at times, so it's easy to get invested in Tsukimi's adventures. However, it touches on a few sensitive topics, and doesn't always handle them well. For example, the gaslighting/blackmail subplot between one of the antagonists and her male victim could have been handled better.

The characters of Princess Jellyfish are interesting due to their quirky personalities. Higashimura has also given each their own distinct body shape instead of defaulting to an average one. While the manga's anatomy is sometimes lacking, the art is very dynamic. Higashimura occasionally parodies vintage shoujo manga, which will be amusing to old-school fans.

Fashion is key in this series, and Higashimura delivers!

The marine-inspired dresses Tsukimi designs are creative, and give insight in the author's knowledge of garment construction.

Princess Jellyfish was originally published in Kodansha's Kiss magazine. Kodansha USA has translated the series into English. Star Comics is in charge of the Italian release, and Akata is taking care of the French version. An anime based on the story aired in 2010. Princess Jellyfish has also been made into a live-action movie and a television show. The Japanese fashion brand Baby, the Stars Shine Bright recently re-released a dress inspired by the series.



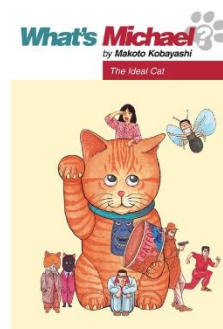
Masayuki Ishikawa
"Maria the Virgin Witch"
"Junketsu no Maria"

The Hundred Years' War is ravaging France, but Maria the witch is determined to bring peace to her country. Using both large-scale magic and the nightly skills of her succubus and incubus familiars, she manipulates the leaders of the opposing armies into giving up their fight. While humans appreciate her actions, God does not approve of her meddling in the natural order he has created. His servant, the Archangel Michael, decrees her punishment: Maria will lose her witching powers once she loses her virginity. In doing so, he gives Maria a difficult dilemma: will she choose her personal happiness, or that of the world?

Given its premise, this manga could have easily been some forgettable ecchi cliché. Ishikawa chose to turn his story into a clever adult comedy, instead. The tale questions the morality of two contrasting worldviews, and does it well. While the comic contains dirty jokes aplenty, they never show up in inappropriate moments. That way, the humour never undermines the story.

The manga's style is anatomically sound, which is refreshing given its erotic nature. It contains its fair share of nudity, but prefers being suggestive over explicit. The art is reminiscent of older fantasy series such as Record of Lodoss War. Ishikawa expertly balances his use of frames and cross-hatching, creating a visually pleasing atmosphere that feels neither bombastic nor empty.

Maria the Virgin Witch was originally published in Kodansha's Good! Afternoon magazine. Kodansha USA handled the English translation. So far, no other official translations have been made. An anime based on the manga aired in 2015.



Makoto Kobayashi
"What's Michael?"

Michael is your average orange tabby cat. He loves nothing more than eating, sleeping, and spending time with his wife Popo. Sometimes a housecat, a father, or even an anthropomorphic businessman, Michael gets in all sorts of comedic trouble.

If you've ever owned a cat, Michael's antics are certain to bring a smile to your face.

Often described as Japan's Garfield, What's Michael? celebrates its 35th birthday this year. The comic has aged surprisingly well.

Kobayashi does a great job illustrating animal quirks, and depicts Michael as a true feline everyman. He alternates stories in which Michael is a housecat with anthropomorphic stories in which cats rule the world. Each gag is only a few pages long, and each presents a self-contained story, so it's easy to pick up a volume without having read the rest of the collection.

Michael's world is steeped in an 80s aesthetic, true to the period in which his stories were drawn. Kobayashi uses an expressive, dynamic art style with caricaturist heads and almost cartoony facial expressions. This goes for his male characters, at least: women suffer from an unfortunate case of same face syndrome, especially earlier on in the series.

What's Michael? was originally published in Kodansha's Weekly Morning magazine. The manga has been translated into English by Dark Horse Comics, French by Glénat, Italian by Star Comics, German by Egmont Manga & Anime, and Polish by Waneko. The manga's popularity resulted into two OVA's and an anime, which aired between 1985 and 1989.

BLUE EXORCIST

Kazuo Kato



Blue Exorcist

Season 1

anime

Available on Netflix

Sons of *Satan* fighting to save the world from demons. A loser becomes a hero, a loner learns to make friends, the cat is not just a cat, and more. It's definitely not an original premise, but the execution has been done so well that it doesn't matter that it's not an original concept. You get all the background you need for each character that's important for the story, the animation style is excellent and the anime is just fun to watch full stop. My only regret is that not all episodes are available on Netflix at this time, because I could easily stand to watch more of this!



Dororo

Dororo

anime (2019 version)

Osamu Tezuka's classic ronin tale graces the screen once again. While *Hyakkimaru* was born, his father made a pact with demons in exchange for power. He sacrificed his son's organs to demons, leaving Hyakkimaru malformed and discarded. Years later, Hyakkimaru teams up with an orphaned child named *Dororo* to hunt down the demons that possess his organs. For each one defeated, Hyakkimaru regains a body part. I admit I had high expectations for this series. Not all of them were met. The episodic monster-of-the-week presentation of the story feels very fragmented. Its build-up is slow, and may turn away viewers who don't know the tale beforehand. The moral ambiguities of the characters are fairly well done, although a tad predictable. While the story structure may be lacking, the animation is great! The fight scenes look very dynamic, and the backgrounds are amazing. It's always interesting to see classic characters drawn in a more modern style. The animators have updated almost every design, except for Tezuka's distinct way of drawing feet as a nod to the original manga. The most surprising aspect of this remake is the depiction of Hyakkimaru's disabilities, and his reaction to regaining certain senses. While not always realistic, the 2019 anime puts effort into giving the story a different psychological angle than the original manga had. Overall, the new *Dororo* remake is worth a watch if you're a Tezuka fan, or if you want to know what the fuzz is about. However, know that it might take a few episodes before you get into the story.



Guilty Crown

Season 1

anime

Available on Netflix

It's easy to summarise *Guilty Crown*. Basically, this is a dystopian post-outbreak world, where Japan isn't allowed to govern themselves anymore in trade for help against this virus. With rebels trying to fight for a renewed independence and normal, innocent bystanders getting caught up whether they like it or not. With added powers and abilities. *Guilty Crown* is chaotic, suffers from bad storytelling and a dire lack of background information

that would help tremendously for the viewer. Unless this sort of anime is 100% your thing, I would pass it up for something else entirely.



Junji Ito Collection

anime

Junji Ito is one of Japan's most infamous horror manga authors. The anime *Junji Ito Collection* portrays a selection of Ito's many short stories. Ito's stories work well because of the disturbing details of his work, and the suspense he builds throughout the manga's panels. Unfortunately, the animation team didn't quite manage to get these across as Ito's distinct style doesn't translate well to animation. Certain tales that send shivers down your spine in their original telling, are now at risk of making you laugh, instead. The stories chosen for this anime were surprising. A fair amount of focus goes to *Souichi*, an old familiar to Ito fans. Lesser known stories were included in favour of more famous ones. For example, I expected *Enigma of Amigara Fault* to make an appearance, but got the fairly forgettable *Used Record* and *Supernatural Transfer Student*, instead. *Tomie* fans, don't feel let down! Although the main series includes only one *Tomie* story, the OVA's contain a special treat just for you. The *Tomie* episodes, along with *Slug Girl* and *Greased* (please don't watch *Greased* while eating) make up this anime's better and more disturbing parts. *Junji Ito Collection* will appeal to those who are already a fan of Ito's work. If you're new to his style, you're better off reading his manga. If you enjoy *seiyuu-hunting*, you will be happy to know the anime contains a few cameos by famous Japanese voice actors.



Mob Psycho 100

Season 1

anime

Available on Crunchy Roll

Mob Psycho 100 sure is popular, there's a manga, a live action adaptation (which is most excellent by the way, we reviewed it BCM #37, it's also available on Netflix) and an anime (by the same people that brought us *One Punch Man*). It tells the story of *Shigeo "Mob" Kageyama*, who despite being a powerful psychic, is a pretty non-descript 8th grader who works for Reigen at his spiritualist bureau. It is filled with a cast of colourful characters that get up to all sorts of (mis)adventures, often of the supernatural kind. *Mob Psycho* is definitely not for everyone, the animation style is a little out there, as is the story. But just like *One Punch Man*, it's weirdness, over the top characters and story-lines are what makes it absolutely amazing. It's refreshing, with well fleshed out characters and just all round fun to watch. If you like your animation a little weird, this is one to check out. I personally can't wait to get my hands on the second season!



T O U R D A T E

09 May (Thu) - **Weinheim (Germany)**
Cafe Central



10 May (Fri) - **Rotterdam (Netherlands)**
Baroeg



11 May (Sat) - **Essen (Germany)**
Turock



12 May (Sun) - **London (UK)**
Underworld



13 May (Mon) - **Paris (France)**
petit Bain



15 May (Wed) - **München (Germany)**
Backstage



16 May (Thu) - **Pratteln (Switzerland)**
Z7



17 May (Fri) - **Montpellier (France)**
Secret place



18 May (Sat) - **Barcelona (Spain)**
Bóveda



19 May (Sun) - **Madrid (Spain)**
Copernico



S U P P O R T A C T

*L*IGHTNING

09 May - 13 May

SEASON OF GHOSTS

09 May - 13 May

AETERNITAS

09 May - 15 May

V I I X A R C

15 May - 19 May



fesTE[M]

16 May - 19 May



Jupiter
Zeus - Legends never die
 Full album
 Genre: heavy metal

If you are a metal fan, especially a fan of metal with a lot of growling and fast past guitar riffs, you will probably really dig *Zeus- Legends never die*. Heck the album will probably make you want to grab tickets to see *Jupiter* live in Europe asap. Alas, I am not a metal fan (not generally speaking), so to me, this sounded extremely repetitive. It's not that I don't enjoy metal in general, it's just that I like more variation in the music I listen to, and if you are like me, this is not the CD for you.

That said, no shade on the composition and performance of the musicians, who clearly all have a lot of skill.

BCM's favourite track: *Tempest*



LOKA
HIGHER x HUGHER
 1 track single
 Jrock/post-punk with some screamo elements

LOKA is, in the first place, an amazing live band. But on their new single *HIGHER X HIGHER* they have managed to capture some of that energy that you would associate with their concerts. *LOKA* sounds a fluid unit, instruments and vocals work together and you can really hear that this is a band with it's own identity.

My only regret is that that it's just the one song, because I could stand listening to a full album of this music.



Madmans Esprit
Glorifying Suicide
 EP
 K-metal/visual kei

Madmans Esprit proves that you don't have to be from Japan to have a visual kei band, and with their 4th work *Glorifying Suicide* they have brought a mix of styles best described as the Queen of the Damned soundtrack meets Cradle of Filth meets Lacrimosa, with added screeching, growls and power metal. Half the time the singing sounds like gibberish of the possessed. Which is a shame, because they can actually play their instruments and the singer has a pretty good voice.

BCM's favourite track: *Glorifying Suicide*

On a side note: BCM does not support the band's gimmick of *Glorifying Suicide*. We will give the band an equal platform like we would any other band that fits the proverbial bill, but that doesn't mean we agree with their spiel.

If you are struggling with mental health and suicidal thoughts, please seek help. Talk to a person you trust, a mental health professional or call your country's suicide prevention hotline. If you can't access any of those, try an online resource such as www.7cups.com

GEEK CULTURE CALENDAR 2019



COMIC CON GENT
 4TH & 5TH OF MAY 2019
 ICC GENT
WWW.COMICCONGENT.COM



ELFTOPIA
 FANTASY FEST
 10TH & 11TH OF AUGUST 2019
 KASTEEL VAN OOIDONK
WWW.ELFTOPIA.BE



COMIC CON ANTWERP
 14TH & 15TH OF SEPTEMBER 2019
 WAAGNATIE ANTWERPEN
WWW.COMICCONANTWERP.COM



HELLTOPIA
 (HORROR FEST)
 26TH OF OCTOBER 2019
 KASTEEL VAN OOIDONK
WWW.HELLTOPIA.BE



ASIAN POP CULTURE FESTIVAL

JAPAN CON
 ASIAN POP CULTURE FESTIVAL
 2ND & 3RD OF NOVEMBER 2019
 TOUR & TAXIS BRUSSEL
WWW.JAPANCON.BE

GOOD THRU DATE

#GTD_EU2019

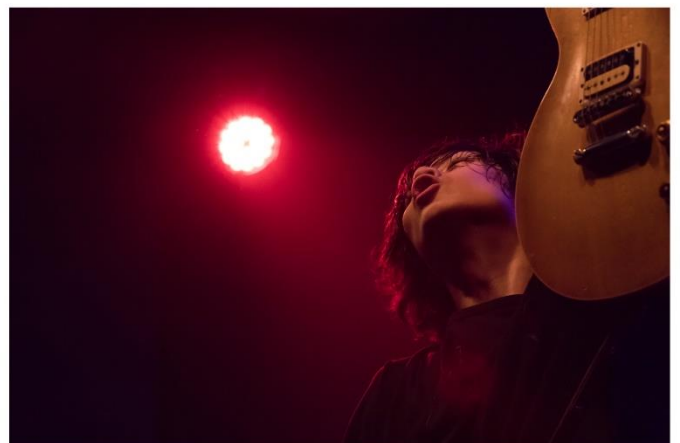
Le Garage Creative Music, Liège, Belgium
Saturday, March 2 2019

GOOD THRU DATE was on their very first EU tour, with their very first single, all in all not the best circumstances for a tour, considering the band had only been formed for about 4 months. Even though not a lot of people had heard their music prior to coming to the live, they still got every person in the audience on their hand. And made the very small audience sound and go wild as if it were a sold out, full size concert hall.

The lack of crowd undoubtedly had everything to do with the fact that the concert clashed with *Comic Con Brussels*, and the fact that the band would be playing all three days of *Made in Asia* just a weekend later. Nevertheless, the band didn't let the small outcome of people stop it and gave it their all. Seldom have I witnessed a band with that much energy on stage, and it was clear from song one that *GOOD THRU DATE* is definitely a live band first.

Definitely a band to keep an eye on, and if you like Jrock, one to check out live if you have the chance. Not often do I feel like not bringing a band back to Europe for another tour would be a disservice, but I definitely feel like it in this case!

Review by Hilde Heyvaert. Photography by Bert Van den Wyngaert.



GOOD THRU DATE

#GTD_EU2019

Made in Asia

Brussels Expo, Laeken (Brussels), Belgium

Friday, March 8 2019

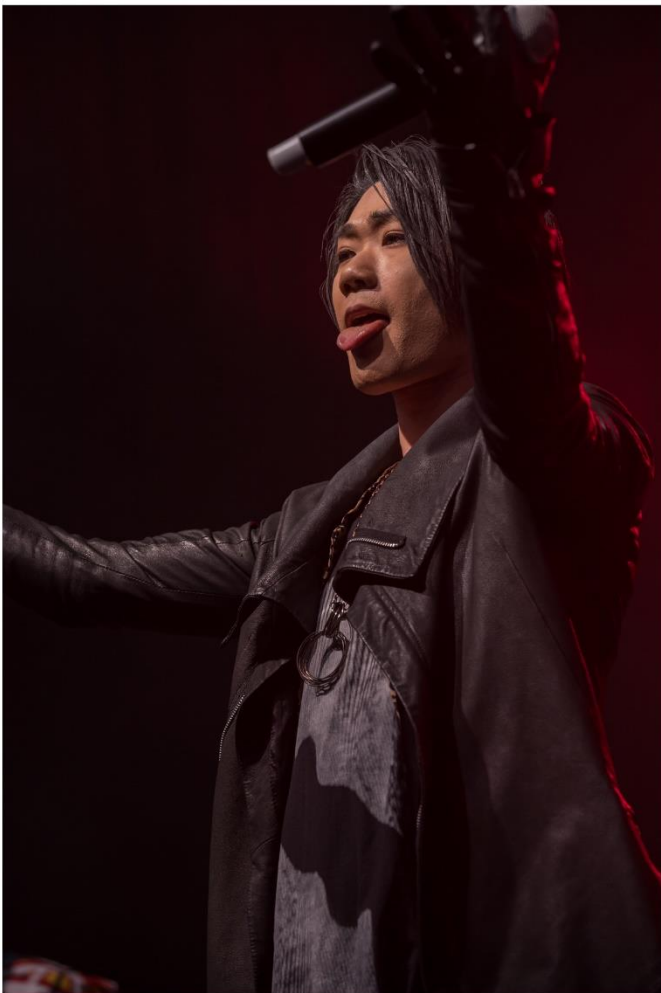
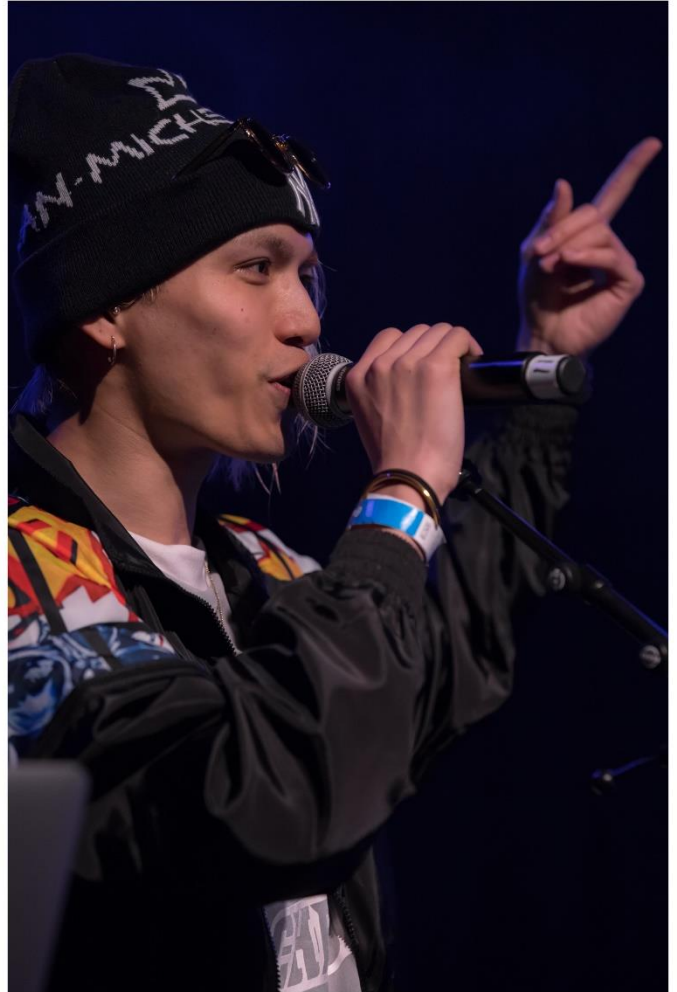
GOOD THRU DATE had been programmed all three days of the *Made in Asia* convention. The first day, which despite of school holidays, was a rather quiet affair, and it came to no surprise that the band started out by playing for less than 10 people. They didn't let that stop them though, and kept going and giving it their all. It came to no surprise that half-way through their one hour set, the crowds had significantly multiplied, with people dancing and really into the music. Undoubtedly, *GOOD THRU DATE* made quite a few new fans that day and rightfully so.

The band made it clear that they can rock any stage, small or big, as well as any number of crowds, proving that they really have what it takes to become a much bigger act.

SETLIST

1. UROBOROS
 2. Get Your Feeling
 3. STEP UP
 4. Mr SELFISH
 5. echoes
 6. I'll be there
 7. MAD STRANGER
 8. MAGIC
 9. Clock
- + encore!

Review by Hilde Heyvaert. Photography by Bert Van den Wyngaert.





GOOD THRU DATE

#GTD_EU2019

Made in Asia

Brussels Expo, Laeken (Brussels), Belgium

Saturday, March 9 2019

GOOD THRU DATE had been programmed during the lunchti-rush slot at noon on the Saturday, the busiest day of the convention. It did, however, mean that the band had a lot of exposure because the dining hall, where the main stage was located was absolutely packed with people eating. The band started off that day with about 50 fans already gathered around the stage, several of which had been waiting at the stage to get a good spot beforehand. And ended with at least double that number. There were also several faces in the crowd that had also been there the day before.

Which comes to no surprised, because the band has amazing energy on stage, and really is a live band. They involve the crowd whenever they can, they are super excited to perform and love what they're doing, and it shows.

Even though their convention slots were only an hour, they still switched the setlists around, including, as always, the three songs from their debut single, but also new and other material and the odd anime cover. All of much to the enjoyment of the fans, who loved it all.

GOOD THRU DATE has proven over and over that they can perform under any circumstance, and not just make the best of it but give the kind of concert that rivals to that of seasoned big name performers on much larger stages. They'll get there some day for sure if they keep going the way they were that Saturday at Made in Asia.

SETLIST

1. I'll be there
2. Get Your Feeling
3. STEP UP
4. Starry Rift
5. CHALA-HEAD-CHALA
6. MAD STRANGER
7. UROBORUS
8. MAGIC
9. Mr Selfish
10. Clock

Review by Hilde Heyvaert. Photography by Bert Van den Wyngaert.



Fate Gear

Made in Asia

Brussels Expo, Laeken (Brussels), Belgium

Saturday, March 9 2019

Fate Gear's concert on the Saturday of Made in Asia attracted quite a few metal fans. Judging by how they went all out, they really enjoyed the concert.

Everyone else, however, not so much. This is the kind of band you will literally only enjoy if you are into generic metal, and no shade to those that do!

And even then, it was very bland. Like the aim was to be loud rather than good.

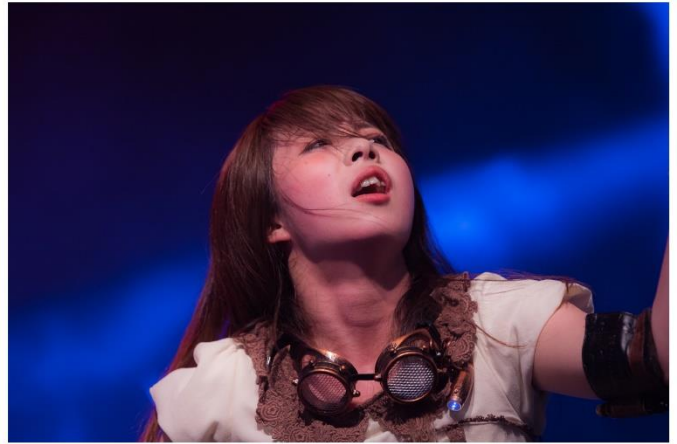
There was little to no variation in the songs.

Even if you went to have a look for the steampunk look of the band, it was, much like their music, mostly the generic kind of thing we're all used to at conventions and events, on both visitors and for sale.

The girls tried their best to put on a good show, and many did enjoy it. But compared to other performers you could see that weekend they fell very, very flat.

We mostly feel bad for the people that were trying to order food in that hall, or sitting down to eat their meal, because unlike those that came to check out the band, they were a lot more stuck and forced to suffer through the live.

Review and photography by Bert Van den Wyngaert.



Mikaru

Mikaru Solo Run 2019

Le Garage Creative Music, Liège, Belgium

Sunday, April 7 2019

Mikaru is a showman, whether he's on stage solo or with G.L.A.M.S. This was proven once again during his most recent solo tour.

It was also clear that he has a very strong fan base, seeing some fans were traveling along with the entire tour, and others were regular faces in the audience.

To Mikaru, it doesn't matter that he's not supported by his band, as he works the crowd without effort and owns any stage he performs on.

Speaking of which, Mikaru solo is literally a solo rendition of songs you normally see performed by G.L.A.M.S. You think that him being accompanied only by a digital track would make the live fall flat, but nothing is less true. He really owns those songs, and has proven over and over again he can perform them and put up a great concert, whether he's fronting a band or taking the stage on his own.

And it's always great to hear Mikaru classics such as *Rainy Highway* or *Dark Side of the Moon*.

Review by Hilde Heyvaert. Photography by Bert Van den Wyngaert.





Open Air Fantasy & Cosplay Festival

*We take you on a fantasy adventure, an utopia where Elves, Trolls,
Orcs, Time travelers, Vikings, Gnomes and Wizards can meet!
A festival of Fantasy and Dreams, located in the medieval
Castle of Ooidonk, nearby the beautiful city of Ghent, Belgium.*

*An event where every cosplayer is welcome, where
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Fantasy authors, Workshops, Concerts and
special guests... Enter a Dreamworld where
everything is possible and live your fantasy!*



10-11 AUGUST 2019

**OOIDONK CASTLE
OOIDONKDREEF 9, SINT-MARIA-LEERNE**

WWW.ELFTOPIA.BE

GOOD THRU DATE released their first single and went on their first European tour. So of course we caught up with haru and his bandmates Tetsuri and Ren to find out more about this new project.

How did you guys get together? What's GTD's origin story?

Ren Miyagawa: haru has been touring solo for a while, but last October he was asked by *HIGHFeEL* to form a band for their agency. Seeing we've all been friends for 5 or 6 years now, he approached us. Because Haru had already seen *Tetsuri* in action on stage, it was kind of logical for them to join up. And then they brought me in as well, which is awesome. I feel really lucky to be part of this.

Tetsuri Hyodo: From the get go, we all really believed in this band. Because of our friendship and energy. The timing is perfect, too.

haru: I've been saying I wanted to tour Europe with a band both times I toured here solo. So 3rd time is definitely a charm *laughs*.

You're a new band, on your first EU tour with your very first release. How would you describe the music on I'll be there to someone who hasn't been able to listen to it yet?

Ren: It's rock music you can definitely dance to if you want because of the EMB elements and the elements of different styles. We basically just mixed up all the things we love and are good at musically so you can really hear our passion and personal style when you listen to the single. It's also pretty uncommon in Japan for two male vocalists to sing in harmony, but haru and I are doing just that *smiles*.

Has the reception of the single so far been everything you had hoped for?

Ren: Absolutely! People are enjoying it even more than we had hoped for. It's amazing how well it has been received. There's a lot of good vibes surrounding it. Especially the eye contact we make with our fans during the lives, that's such a special moment for us *smiles*. It gives us even more energy and power for our music.

Which is your favourite song to play live?

haru: *I'll be there*.

Ren: *Get the Feeling*. I did all the programming on that song, it's the one I worked on the most.

Tetsuri: It's actually not one by GOOD THRU DATE, but *Echoes by Universe*. I can play it very freely and with a lot of emotion. I love the rock and roll style of it. It's a very good song with a great melody that really suits Haru's voice. A lot of people always sing along, which makes me happy. It really lifts me up.

The CD only has 3 tracks, less than what gets played at a concert. How did you decide which of your songs would make it on there?

Ren: We only have been writing GTD music since November, so our repertoire is still expanding. For the single, we all agreed to make two songs as demos, and then we picked one by each member *smiles*.

You're all part of at least one other project. How does this reflect on GOOD THRU DATE?

Tetsuri: It's mostly just planning. We all do our thing and it's just getting everything organised. And it works.

haru is totally into soccer, how about you guys?

Ren: I like basketball best, Tetsuri and I play together.

Tetsuri: I do like soccer, both to watch and play myself.

Ren: I like to watch all sports though: tennis, pool, literally anything.

Speaking of which: who's the best at playing pool?

haru: ME *laughs*.

Tetsuri: We're nearly as good at him, but he just gets drunk and then wins! I have no idea how though *laughs*.

haru, how do you feel that having come here twice as a solo artist has influenced this tour?

I definitely feel like it helped a lot, I feel that as a band, we were better prepared for our first EU tour because of it. I already knew how things worked when it comes to touring Europe, what the crowds are like, the venues, the crew. So I was able to share that with Ren and Tetsuri. Music has no borders, no matter where you are in the world. And now I got to share that experience with my friends, whom I really respect, too. That, to me, is awesome *smiles*.

haru, last time you told us you were considering getting a pet. Have you gotten one yet?

haru: No, not yet. I'm still working up to it.

How about you guys, do you have pets?

Tetsuri: I have a dog, a Chihuahua, at my parents' house.

Ren: I have a cat, I'm actually more of a cat person than a dog person to be honest.

Tetsuri: I like both cats and dogs *smiles*.

So which is the best date of the year to get through?

Tetsuri: All the birthdays of my fellow band members. Because we have an awesome celebration each time it's someone's birthday and that always makes me happy *smiles*. I really enjoy celebrating my birthday with them, too. I think it's because it's also kind of a bonding experience.

Ren: Definitely Valentine's Day, because I love chocolate. Not as much as coffee though, I love coffee so much I ground up my own from beans every morning. So I can have coffee with some chocolate *laughs*.

haru: I love every day! *Smiles* there's always something new and exciting to look forward to.

You all love cheese, which is the best cheese a fan can give you?

haru: I like Gouda best.

Ren: Camembert.

Tetsuri: I like both Camembert and Brie equally.

Interview by Hilde Heyvaert. Photography by Bert Van den Wyngaert.





haru



Ren



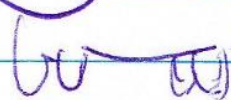
Tetsuri

ドクター アニメー

Dr. UNDY

エコ プロジェクト
A.I.R PROJECT

Made in Asta



by Ren

(From G.T.D.)

Win a cheki/Instax photo signed by GOOD THRU DATE !

Here's what you can win, as if the title wasn't a dead give-away: an Instax Square format photo signed by all three members of GOOD THRU DATE! Which they signed for one lucky fan on the Friday of Made in Asia.

All you need to do is explain, in your own way, why you should win this particular (signed) cheki. You can write something, draw something, make a Photoshop collage: anything goes as long as you can send it by email and it is safe for work! So no porn, no smutty fanfic, keep it decent and it's a valid entry ;).

Submissions can be emailed to hilde.heyvaert@gmail.com

The last date for submissions is August 21st, so you still have plenty of time to come up with something!

The winner will be personally notified after the deadline* and asked for their home address so we can mail** out their cheki. Don't worry, your address will NOT be shared or sold to third parties, so your privacy is definitely assured. We don't even store addresses. So you can count on us being GDPR compliant.

* Please take into account that judging takes a bit of time, especially during final editing period of the next edition, so please be patient for the results as it can take a few days for them to be released. We will email everyone that submitted to let them know whether or not they won.

** We rely on regular, unsigned and thus unregistered mail to send out cheki via B-Post and we are no means responsible should the post screw up. They haven't so far and we've sent cheki all over the globe, but you never know so we like to mention this in advance. They can also take quite a while to deliver, so please be patient. Especially if you live outside of Belgium. Shipping to locations outside of Europe may take anything from a handful of days, to a couple of weeks and even a few months.



Mikaru was back in Europe on his second solo run, combining art with music. We went down to his expo and concert in Liège, and afterwards asked him some quick questions to catch-up.

Some of our questions are prompts, where we say a word and Mikaru replies with the first thing that comes to mind.

You are also doing an art expo on this tour. Can you tell a little about the paintings and jewels on display?

It's nice to be able to display both some of my paintings and jewellery this tour. I've been making jewellery every day for the last few months and each piece is made with my heart and soul put into it. I just make what I feel like and I want, and that especially goes for my jewellery designs.

What kind of art do you like best?

I don't just like beautiful works, or at least works I find beautiful, but also those that I might not see as beautiful, but that still make me to think and imagine the meaning and background embedded in them. So I guess I like both works that are beautiful to me, as well as evocative ones.

Best art supply store in the world?

Sekaido in Shinjuku, Tokyo.

Solo

I'm always very relaxed when I'm touring solo. Because those are the moments where I, and I alone, control the stages. I find a lot of freedom in that.

Spring

Spring excites me.
Animal instinct wakes me up.
AWOOOOOO!!!!!!

Easter

Fried egg.

Vampire Bride.

Last time you told us you were looking for your vampire bride this tour, how is the search going?

I keep looking for her, however, there are far too many candidates. Meaning I am having a hard time choosing. So let's try something else! The first one that kisses me on a night when the moon is full will be my bride!

Vampire steak

(there is a restaurant in London called *Garlic and Shots*, and they are famous for their vampire steak).

Once I have found my bride, I should go to London with her and try this out!

Inspiration from this tour

This time I went to the South of France, Marseille and Toulon in particular. They are both such beautiful cities. I would like to go back there on holiday to enjoy them more.

Famous last words ;)

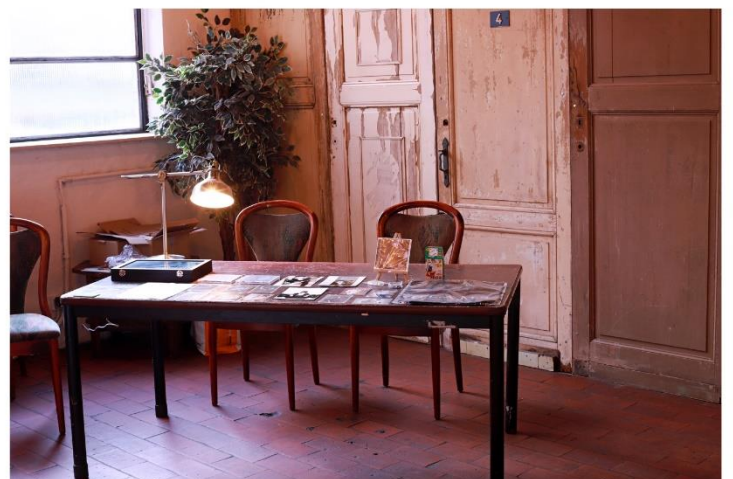
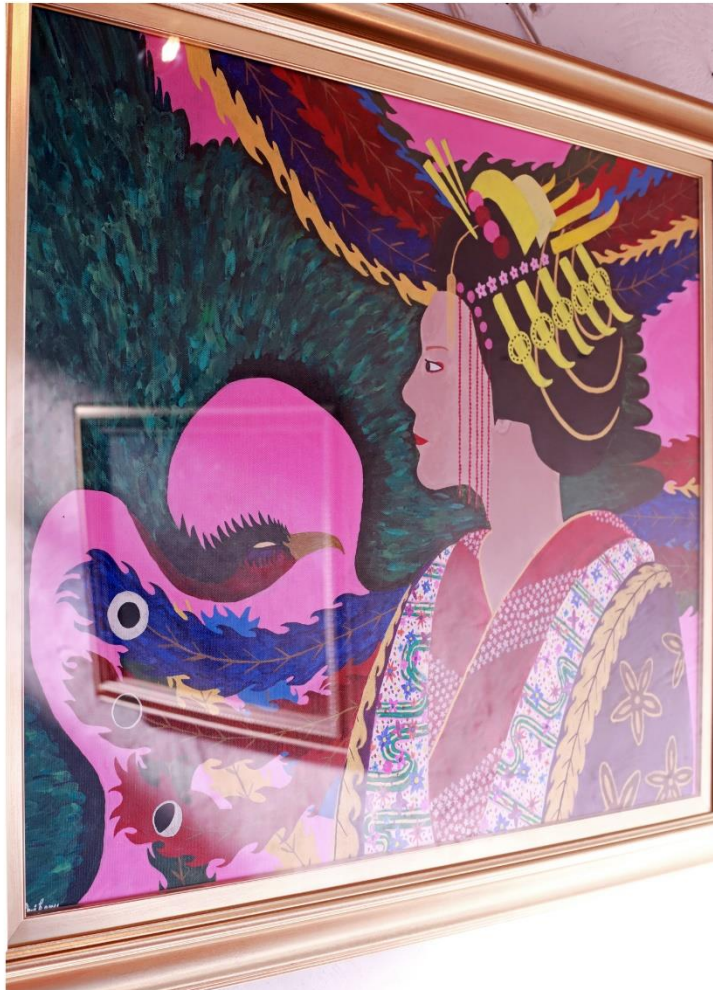
Come Out, Come Out, Wherever You Are.

Interview and photography by Hilde Heyvaert. Photo edit by Mikaru.





7.4.2019



Win a cheki/Instax photo signed by Mikaru !

Here's what you can win, as if the title wasn't a dead give-away: an Instax Square format photo signed by Mikaru! Which he signed for one lucky fan when he was performing and showing his art at Le Garage in Liège, Belgium.

All you need to do is explain, in your own way, why you should win this particular (signed) cheki. You can write something, draw something, make a Photoshop collage: anything goes as long as you can send it by email and it is safe for work! So no porn, no smutty fanfic, keep it decent and it's a valid entry ;).

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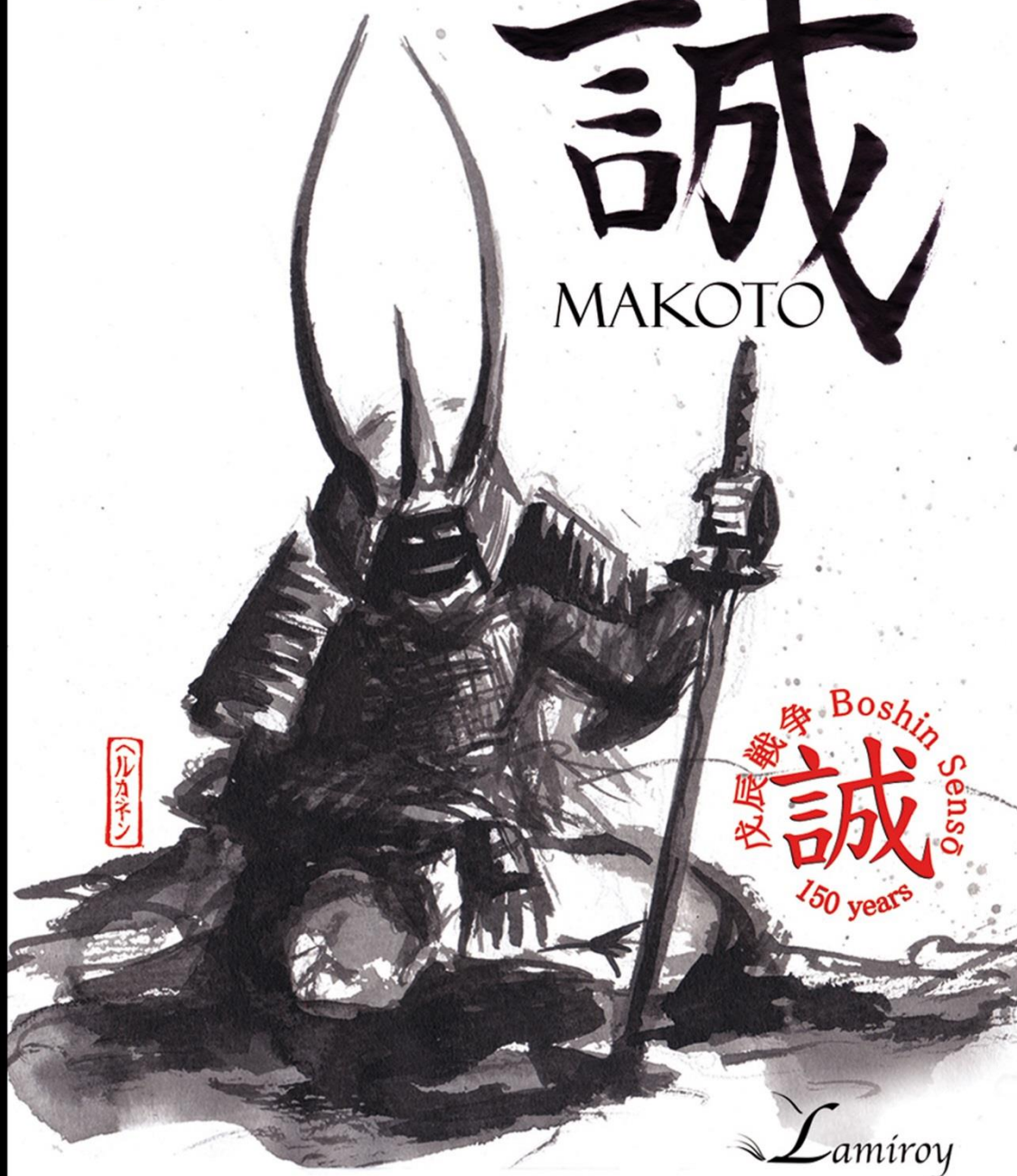
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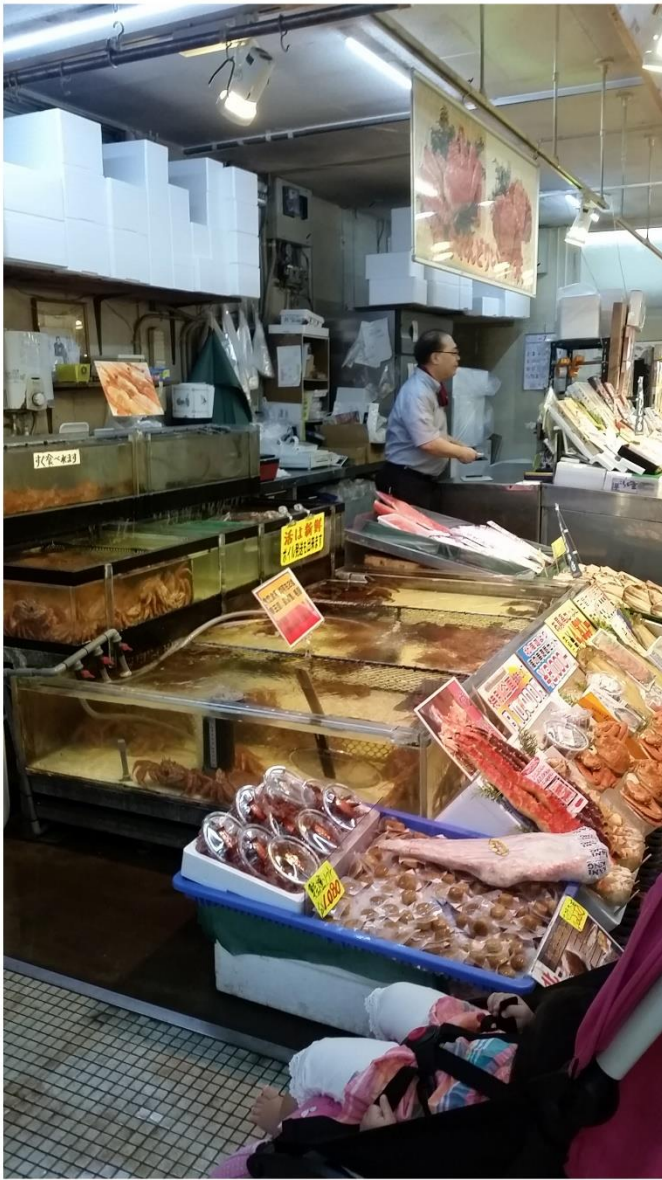


Exploring Hakodate city...









fish market



Goryokaku Tower and fort





Shinseigumi Tonjo
of the
Hakodate
Motomachi Hotel



Kôryû-ji

The memorial of Shoshin Zammoku

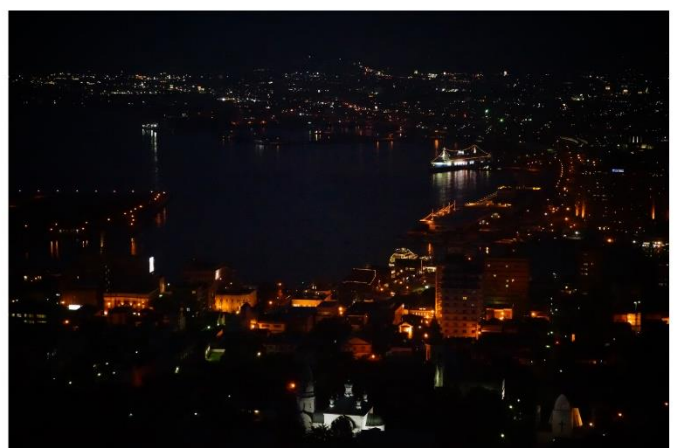
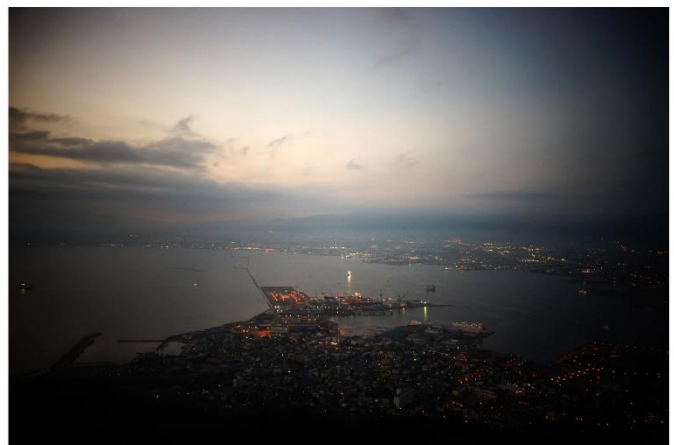
On May 11 1869, the fiercest battle of the Hakodate War was fought in downtown Hakodate. At that time, the *Kôryûji* temple was used as a branch of the Hakodate hospital to treat deserted soldiers of the old shogunate army.

On that day, the shogun's army attacked the temple, killed all sick and wounded in their beds and set fire to the temple. The *Aizu clan* fought to defend the temple and paid dearly for it, losing many. In 1879, the temple was rebuilt, and the following year the Aizu clan erected a memorial for the victims of the attack.

The Chinese characters on it read *Shoshin Zammoku*, meaning *mourning an ancient battlefield*, quoting *Rika*, a Chinese scholar of the *Tang period* (619-906).







Enjoying the view from
Mount Hakodate



Shomyo-ji

It is said that a priest named *Enryu* build *Amada-an*, a small building dedicated to the *Buddha Amida*, in *Kameda Village* in 1644 near the present-day *Kameda Hachiman* shrine.

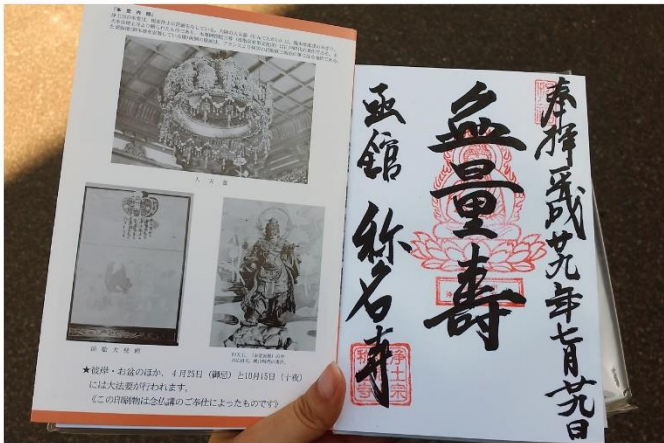
In 1655 it was upgraded to the *Amida-do* hall, and in 1690 it was renamed the *Shomyo-ji temple*.

In 1708 it was moved to a site near the *Yayoi elementary school* in the more prosperous port area. For a while it was even used as a consular site for England and France when Hakodate's port first became international.

Between 1897 and 1929 it suffered damage from fire many times, so in 1929 it was rebuilt with reinforced concrete.

On the grounds you can find monuments for *Masamichi Kono* and members of the *Shinsen-gumi*. Memorial services are regularly held in their honour. Other monuments are the one honouring *Kahei Takadaya* and the oldest in Hakodate: the *Jyoji monument*, built in February 1367, which is officially recognised as one of *Hokkaido's* tangible cultural assets.

Futhermore the grounds are home to gravestones of some local heroes, the *Takadayas*, who aided in early Hakodate's progress. *Naritoyo Fukushi*, who assisted *Jyo Niijima* in traveling abroad and building Japan's first meteorological observatory. And *Seiroku Tsusumi*, founder of the *Nichiro Fishery Corporation*.



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You might have seen *Bas and Yuko's* food truck, **Amai**, at the Japanese garden in Hasselt, Belgium, or a Belgian convention, you might even have ordered food from them. We spoke to them to find out a little more about Amai, and Japanese food on the go in general.

How would you explain the concept of taiyaki to someone who has never heard of it?

Easy. A delicious filled Japanese waffle. It's common and popular street food in Japan and the original taiyaki is shaped like a fish with sweet bean filling. It's delicious, unique and absolutely very new for a lot of people in Belgium *smiles*.

What gave you the idea for a taiyaki food truck? And in how far is it a traditional Japanese yatai instead of a food truck?

Yuko: I like both eating and talking to people, so that's perfect for a food truck business. And of course I wanted to teach Belgians something about Japan. But in a fun way, of course. Food is an ideal way and a food truck is much easier than running a restaurant. I feel that a yatai is more like street food: traditional, cheap and easy. A food truck is more elegant, original and unique, and yet it also poses more of a challenge. So we try to offer a cheap, traditional, yet elegant and unique product *smiles*.

Taiyaki are baked in a special fish shape. Was it hard to find the traditional molds for your food truck?

Not really, taiyaki is especially tasty in its original fish shape, which is the shape it nearly always comes in. So the waffle irons weren't hard to find in Japan.

I can imagine it wasn't as easy to import them though.

That's absolutely true. We even had to pay extra import fees to the embassy. Sadly the packaging was badly damaged, and we were left without the possibility to point out the ones responsible for that.

If you could design a taiyaki in any other shape than a fish, which one would be it?

That's a good question, and also a hard one. Maybe a bunny? That's also a very popular animal in Japan, and everyone thinks it's cute. But if I really get to choose, I would probably pick one of the *Studio Ghibli* characters. I am a huge fan of their works. *Totoro*, *Ponyo*, *Ohmu* of *Nausicaä Valley of the Wind*, probably one of those.

When did you bake your very first taiyaki?

I think a year before our first opening day. At least that's what I remember.

Over here taiyaki aren't that well-known yet. How about in Japan?
I am pretty sure that 100% of all Japanese people know taiyaki. They probably know it as well as they know sushi! Actually, it's as common in Japan as waffles are in Belgium *smiles*.

Belgium is known for its waffles. Does that influence the sales of taiyaki?

Yes, absolutely! Waffles are such a huge part of Belgian culture, and everyone has a very positive image of them. Which really helps with

the sales. In Japan, adults eat less sweet things, but here in Belgium I would say as many adults as children enjoy that type of food. Which is lucky for us *smiles*.

Yuko, according to you, what is the biggest difference between food culture in Japan and Belgium?

Variety. In Japan I have so many options, there's so much to choose from. Not just the dishes, but also sauces, herbs, literally everything. I don't miss Japan all that much, except for the food. There are so many restaurants and then there's *konbini* (convenience stores) everywhere. Sometimes I just don't feel like cooking and then I miss the *bento boxes* and *osouzai* ready to eat dishes you can buy in Japan. And they come in so many options, too: meat, fish, vegetables, desserts, anything and everything you can think of. I really, really miss that.

Recently you have expanded your offer from just taiyaki to mochi ice cream. Which other dish would you like to add to your menu?

We just added a new dish at *Made in Asia*: regular *daifuku mochi*. We also hinted at the next dish we want to test: *Yuko's nachos*! They will be fully vegan, because we have noticed the demand for vegan food keeps growing. We also would like people to make conscious choices when it comes to their health, which we are happy to assist in

At the moment you have three flavours of taiyaki: sweet beans, matcha and ham & cheese, with an added special from time to time. What can we expect this summer? And why specifically these flavours?

During the summer we will likely have the same flavours available but for the spring and fall, we can do different ones. Apple, pumpkin and chestnut! Curry might also be ideal for summer, actually. We will see! To be honest we prefer making what our customers like best. So I would like to ask all of you to tell us what you'd like us to add on our facebook page (@amaitaiyaki)!

What is the craziest suggestion for a new taiyaki recipe you have ever heard of?

As we like trying out new dishes and flavours, there's no such thing as a crazy flavour. Especially not our dough can be filled up with such a wide range of things. But, we did once sell wafels with ham, cheese, whipped cream and chocolate sauce! Admittedly, we haven't tried those ourselves yet.

On a closing note, do you have a message for your customers, both new and repeaters?

We would like to thank all of our customers! We love working in our truck because everyone that comes to buy our food is always in a good mood. It also makes us happy we see our loyalty cards show up, over and over again. That's very fulfilling to us, because it means that our customers are really satisfied with what we are offering and, we hope at least, our service. Thank you all so much *smiles*!

Find out where to find Amai next on amai-japansewafels.com
Interview and photography by Hilde Heyvaert



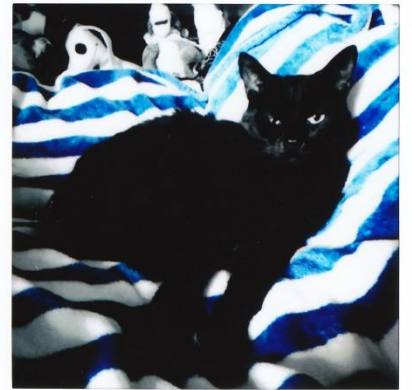
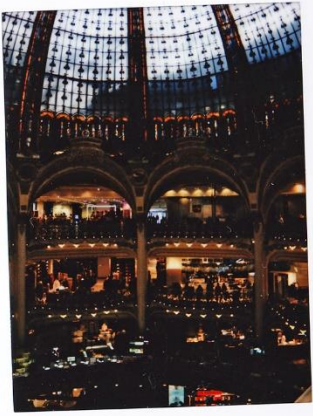
CHECK THAT CHECK!

Do you want your photo to be part of next edition's Check that Checki page? Just send it in!

All types of Fujifilm Instax cameras are welcome!

Cameras used this time: Fujifilm Instax mini 90 NEO CLASSIC and Instax Square SQ10.

Film: mini classic, candy pop and Square classic.



EVENT CALENDAR

All dates and information may be subject to change, none of this is within our control.

June

Magical Pride

Date: 1

Venue: Walt Disney Studios Park,
Disneyland Paris

City: Marne-la-Vallée

Country: France

www.disneylandparis.com

Star Wars

A New Hope in concert

Date: 8

Venue: Brussels Expo, Palais 12

City: Laeken/Brussels

Country: Belgium

www.mbpresents.be

the GazettE, world tour

11: Electric Ballroom, London, UK

14: Le Bataclan, Paris, France

16: E werk, Cologne, Germany

19: Backstage Werk, Munich,
Germany

The Lion King & Jungle Festival

Date: June 30 - September 22

Venue: Disneyland Park,

Disneyland Paris

City: Marne-la-Vallée

Country: France

www.disneylandparis.com

July

Electroland

Date: 5-7

Venue: Walt Disney Studios Park,
Disneyland Paris

City: Marne-la-Vallée

Country: France

www.disneylandparis.com

Necronomidol

European tour 2019

11: La Douche Froide, Metz, France

12-14: Hyper Japan, London, UK

16: The Underworld, London, UK

17: The Hare and the Hounds,
Birmingham, UK

19: The Tooth & Claw, Inverness,
Scotland

20: Vessel 11, Rotterdam,

The Netherlands

21: Blue Shell, Cologne, Germany

23: 45 Special, Oulu, Finland

25-58: Narcon, Linköping, Sweden

<http://necronomidol.com/european-tour-2019>

Hyper Japan

Date: 12-14

Venue: Olympia

City: London

Country: UK

<https://hyperjapan.co.uk>

August

Antwerp Pride – Love United

Date: 7-11

Venue: various

City: Antwerp

Country: Belgium

<https://antwerppride.eu>

Antwerp Pride parade

Date: 11

Venue: starts at the Vlaamse Kaai

City: Antwerp

Country: Belgium

<https://antwerppride.eu>

Elftopia

Date: 11-12

Venue: Ooidonk Castle grounds

City: Deinze

Country: Belgium

www.elftopia.be

CROSSFAITH

Supporting Of Mice and Man

12: De Helling, Utrecht,

The Netherlands

13: Dynamo, Eindhoven,

The Netherlands

19: Le Trabendo, Paris, France

Abunai

Date: 23-25

Venue: NH Hotel Koningshof

City: Veldhoven

Country: The Netherlands

www.abunai.nl

September

Comic Con Antwerp

Date: 14 & 15

Venue: Waagnatie

City: Antwerp

Country: Belgium

<https://comicconantwerp.be>

October

Star Wars

The Empire Strikes Back
in concert

Date: 26

Venue: Brussels Expo, Palais 12

City: Laeken/Brussels

Country: Belgium

www.cineconcert.be

Disneyland Paris Halloween

Date: October 1 - November 4

Halloween parties (extra ticket events):
October 26 and 31

Venue: Disneyland Paris

City: Marne-la-Vallée

Country: France

www.disneylandparis.com

Star Wars

The Empire Strikes Back in concert

Date: 26

Venue: Brussels Expo, Palais 12

City: Laeken/Brussels

Country: Belgium

www.cineconcert.be



November

Disneyland Paris Christmas season

Date: mid November - early January

Venue: Disneyland Paris

City: Marne-la-Vallée

Country: France

www.disneylandparis.com



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BCM SNAP

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Send a photo of yourself wearing J-fashion, any kind will do, to
hilde.heyvaert@gmail.com
and you may very well see yourself featured in the next edition!



COMIC CON BRUSSELS SNAP

Tour 4 Taxis, Brussels, Belgium. Sunday, March 3 2019

Photography by Hilde Heyvaert



MADE IN ASIA SNAP

Brussels Expo, Laeken, Belgium. March 8 & 9 2019

Photography by Hilde Heyvaert



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Creative Director
Christoph Hagel

Creative Director
Vartan Bassil



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14 SEPTEMBER 2019
CIRQUE ROYAL BRUSSELS



The Big Earth Day Issue: are phaseouts and bans on single-use plastics the way forward, or will it end up causing more harm than good?

So *Earth Day* came and went, and almost 2 years after the finale of the celebrated *Sir David Attenborough* nature documentary series, *Blue Planet II*, brought awareness of the impact of carelessly-disposed-of plastic waste in our oceans to the mainstream, the issue of how plastics, and in particular, single-use plastics, is still often talked about today, and has resulted in an onslaught of moves by governments, NGOs and corporations to address the global issue of plastic waste. However, it has also sparked debate as to whether or not the majority of the moves, particularly to curb the usage of single-use plastics (SUPs), are either the right thing or just a huge virtue-signalling fad that will end up leading to unintended consequences somewhere down the line, particularly in terms of environmental impact and customer satisfaction.

When *Blue Planet II* aired its finale, back in late 2017, an unprecedented emotional wave of outcry, on a scale not seen since the Ethiopian Famine of the 1980s, led to the general public calling for measures to tackle the onslaught of oceanic plastic waste. Subsequently, many organisations, companies and governments announced moves to curb the usage of single-use plastics. Most of these moves involved phasing-out the use of single-use plastics and their substitution with alternatives, including naturally-biodegradable materials and reusables.

But are these moves good, or do they end up causing more trouble than it's worth? Well, it depends on whether or not there is already infrastructure for recycling it or if there's an actual need for its elimination, not to mention the effect it would have on consumers. One example of a corporate strategy is that of *The Walt Disney Company*. Last July, *Disney* announced a multi-faceted strategy to reducing the use of single-use plastics throughout the entire company, with the most obvious moves seen in their frontline customer-facing subsidiary: *Disney Parks, Experiences and Products* (DPEP).

Their strategy announced the phasing-out of plastic straws, lids and coffee stirrers, as well as switching the in-room amenities at their resorts and Cruise Line to bolted dispensers that use replaceable plastic bottles, and introducing reusable bags in their theme parks and Cruise Line as an optional extra for those wishing to cut down on the number of free plastic bags one would receive during the course of a typical Disney vacation.

However, the strategy has already led to unintended consequences. Concerns were raised by disability rights groups about the straws because most of the alternatives aren't suitable for all disabilities, and some feel that it would end up having an adverse impact on independence, particularly since plastic straws have always been the best solution for them, and the lids phase-out has led to an increase in spillages caused by people accidentally knocking the drinks over and even bumping into people, with concerns that it may end up with violent confrontations from more-irate guests, and potential damage to cameras. Also, the lids phase-out had one huge flaw: coffee cup lids, which are also made of plastic, yet, as far as I know, are not yet being targeted, particularly since there's no viable alternative yet, and

using reusable coffee cups in the United States would violate the strict *Occupational Safety and Health Act* (OSHA), so one wouldn't be able to use their own reusable in any given *Starbucks* or *Joffrey's* in the Disney Parks.

The coffee cup lids also fit the soft drinks cups, so they've already become a work-around to the phaseout of the soft drinks lids, and because of the density of the plastic used with the coffee cup lids, this, however, generates more waste than the soft drinks lids, and this is a clear sign that it's leading to a degradation in the guest experience. And the bags have generated even-greater discussion, due to the fact that they are the most widely-reused single-use plastic in the world. In fact, some say that plastic bags should not really be considered 'single-use' at all, because of their high reusability factor compared to other plastics, and paper bags as well, since they're impervious to liquids, and don't rip as easily, not to mention that they are already recyclable, despite the fact that most have to take them to designated recycling points, and some municipalities have a hard time processing them through their single-stream processing machines, due to them being ill-equipped to deal with polyethylene film.

Last April, *Disney Store North America* announced a phaseout of their free plastic carrier bags in their stores throughout the United States and Canada, including those situated in cities where no ordinances exist, or have yet to be passed, in favour of offering reusable bags made of non-woven polypropylene (NWPP) for 99¢ USD (approximately 76p GBP or €0.88 at the time of writing). However, the move led to a lot of criticism, with people complaining about being forced to purchase the bags if they didn't have their own, or having to carry the purchases out unbagged, and there has also been criticism over the reusable bags themselves. Criticism was levelled against the limited sizes available, with only medium and large sizes available, and no option for a jumbo (XL) size, compared to the previous situation where there's always been jumbo-sized plastic bags and reusable bags available, which was especially highlighted during the Black Friday of 2018 and the pre-Christmas rush, when people complained of being forced to purchase the more-expensive jumbo-sized seasonal tote for \$5 just to have a means of carrying large amounts of purchases, where before, it wasn't a problem, since Cast Members would have made sure that the purchases were properly bagged, and customers wouldn't have to worry about spending extra (or at least more than the minimum bag charge in some areas), and this also highlighted the unsuitability of such a policy in such a store.





While places such as Costco are more suitable, since the majority of purchases made there are usually in bulk, and thus don't warrant bagging, since they'd be transported directly by the customer to their vehicle, Disney Stores are not suitable, since the majority are situated inside shopping malls and city centres, and the majority of shoppers who go there would usually do it on a whim, and would always need to have a cheap or free means of carrying their purchases out of the store without the need to struggle with them unbagged, or the stress of having to carry around empty reusable bags with the expectation that they might buy something in there, or more than what they originally intend to. This is especially a problem during sales, where one would spontaneously purchase more than just, for example, one plush. And since Disneyland Paris has now followed suit, it's going to be a question of whether or not it's also going to be practical in the Disney Parks, particularly since virtually every purchase is always done on a whim. That said, in the long run, is it going to result in a loss of profits made on merchandise, or is there going to be any benefit made? Chances are, assuming that it's going to be no issue, there'll always be people willing to buy the merch, and the reusable bags too.

However, there is truth to the potential negative impact a forced re-usables policy would have. Last year, the independent British coffee chain *Boston Tea Party* made the widely-publicised move to phase out takeout cups, and although it has been widely praised, it has resulted in a loss of £250,000 (approximately €288,251.50), with the supermarket chain *Waitrose* following suit. Although it's unknown whether or not *Waitrose's* move has resulted in a similar loss, since it's mainly a perk for *myWaitrose* members. *Boston Tea Party's* CEO decided to stand by it, and hopes the majors would follow suit. Though this does also raise the question of practicality. Will it lead to more and more people taking reusables with them everywhere? Well, it depends on the circumstances really, but in the near future, assuming that this doesn't end up like the *Anya Hindmarch* reusable bags fad of 2007, it could well be the new normal, but of course, there are always going to be scenarios where it can be detrimental, par-

ticularly to hygiene and practicality, but then again, some do also say that science will lead to more viable, greener alternatives that don't hurt the bottom line, yet please both sides that support such moves, and those who oppose them.

Then there's also the question of lifecycle. Since the bags are the most contentious single-use plastic, there's been a lot of debate as to whether or not reusable bags are the angelic panacea to the environmental problem or will end up causing more harm than good. According to two lifecycle analyses conducted by England's Environment Agency and their Danish counterpart, most reusable bags were rated with high carbon footprints, which take into account their manufacture, transportation and the baseline reference of a lightweight plastic bag reused at least once. According to the English study, a non-woven polypropylene (NWPP) bag requires around 11 reuses to offset the equivalent of one plastic bag used once, while if the same plastic bag was reused as a bin liner, then 26 reuses of the same reusable bag is required. However, when a plastic bag is reused multiple times, for example, shopping again, then the NWPP bag needs 33 reuses. The Danish study, however, breaks the impact down into two categories: climate change, and resource usage.

Thus, their study found that an NWPP bag needed 6 reuses to offset the climate change impact of a lightweight plastic bag, while for the resources side, it needed 52, which is greater than the English study. While the English study did not include recycled PET (RPET) bags, which is the type of reusable bag that's sold in Disney's theme parks, the Danish study does give a high number of minimum required reuses to offset both climate and resource impacts equivalent to one plastic bag. 8 is needed for climate, while resource needs 84, so in order for those reusable bags to be better than a plastic bag, those type of bags need to be reused outside of a typical Disney trip, so the recommendation is to reuse them wherever you can, even if you can only take them to the supermarket. As for cotton bags, both studies put the minimum number of required reuses to astronomical levels, but cotton has the advantage of being the most durable material compared to NWPP and RPET, which do have a more finite lifecycle, as well as both densities of polyethylene used in plastic bags, so they can last a lifetime, so as long as the user maximises their full potential.

So the real answer is to reuse whatever bags you might have stashed somewhere, be it plastic, or other materials, and put them to good use. After all, every bag has an environmental impact. And as for the general answer in terms of whether or not phasing out single-use plastics is going to be the panacea to the world's plastic pollution problem, only time will tell if it will make any difference or not, or if there'll be a scientific breakthrough that might very well reduce the need for a phase-out.

Either way, the consensus is there to reduce whatever you consume, to reuse whatever you have, and recycle wherever you can, and as long as recycling confidence improves. After all, there is only one planet, and that planet is our Planet A: Earth. Keep it beautiful and liveable.





Mikaru at Le Garage, Liège, Belgium, during his 2019 solo run.

Photo by Hilde Heyvaert, edit by Mikaru.